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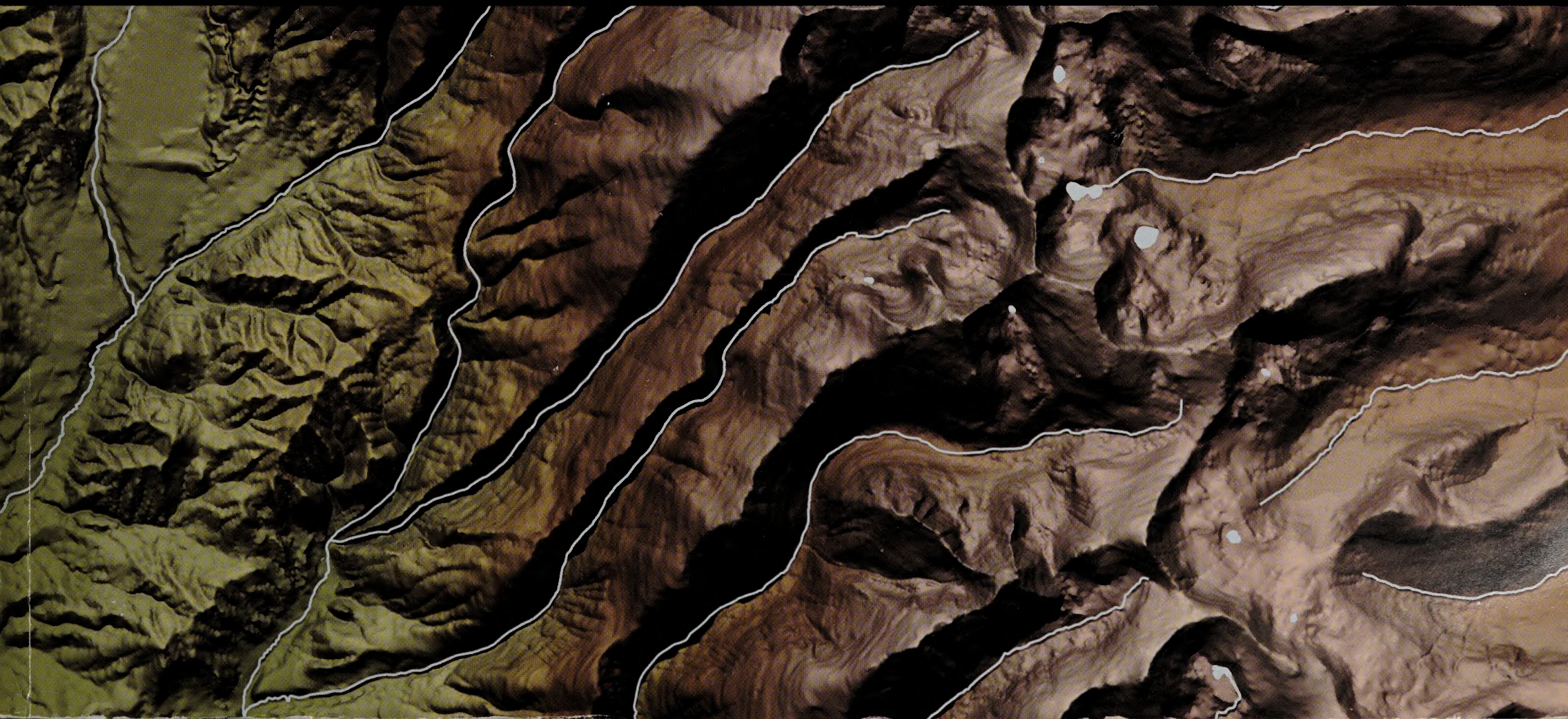
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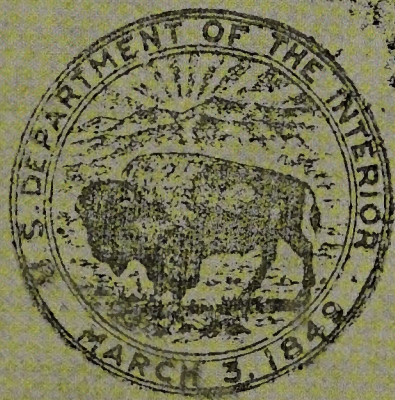
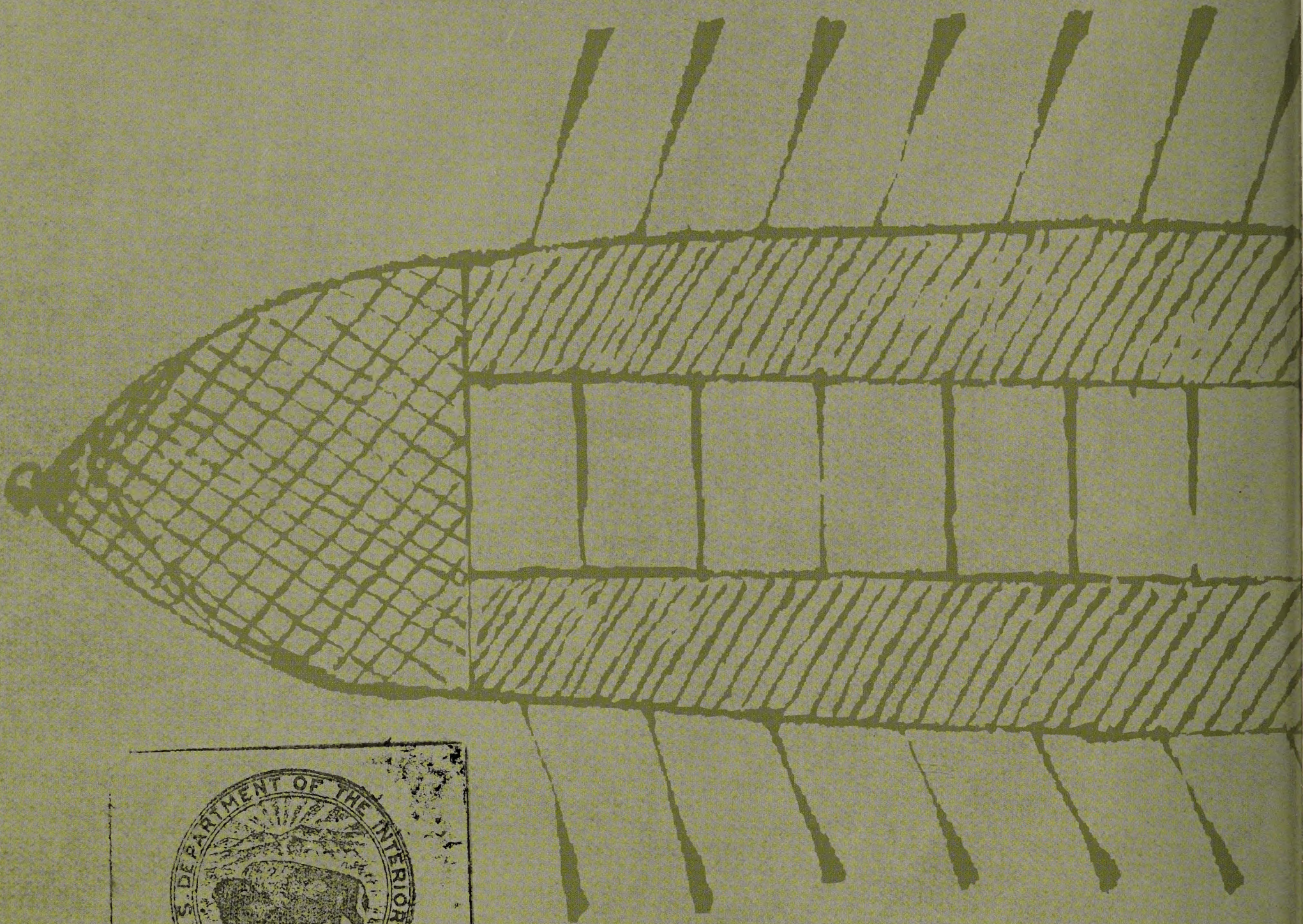
# Joined by a Journey

Mike Crosby

The Lives of the Lewis and Clark Corps of Discovery







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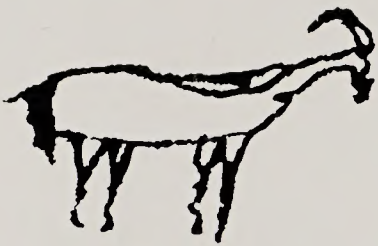
# Joined by a Journey

Mike Crosby

The Lives of the Lewis and Clark Corps of Discovery

*Mike Crosby*  
*10/3/05*







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# Introduction

Many people have inspired and informed this work. When I moved to Salmon to become a high school English and social studies teacher in 1974, principal George Artemis introduced me to Dave Ainsworth. Dave had been a student of the Expedition for years, particularly its passage through eastern Idaho. He made presentations in my classes and even took us on a field trip to Lemhi Pass in a black and yellow school bus. I especially value his insights into what the Indian roads the Expedition followed may have been like.

In 1986 I took a weeklong seminar along the Lolo Trail with three wonderful instructors from the University of Idaho: Carlos Schwantes, Steve Brunsfeld, and Sam Ham. Thanks to a grant from the Steele-Reese Foundation, geologist Glen Hugunin and I were able to offer a similar seminar in Montana and Idaho in 1988 and 1989.

In the late '90s Jackie Zadow of Western Montana College-Elderhostel asked me to talk about Lewis and Clark at the programs she was developing in Lemhi County. And in 1999 Rick Ardinger of the Idaho Humanities Council hired me as an evaluator for a Lewis and Clark field seminar for teachers coordinated by Kris Major of the Idaho Historical Society. I credit two of the instructors for the seminar with recharging my interest in Lewis and Clark. James Ronda's presentation led me to think about the Expedition and Thomas Jefferson in ways I never had before. And Steve Russell led us along parts of the Lolo Trail he has studied for many years. If you want to get the feel of the

trail under your boot soles and the passage of the Corps in your imagination, go with Steve.

This book has its origins in a series of articles first published in the Recorder Herald, a weekly newspaper in Salmon, Idaho. Like other communities along the Lewis and Clark Trail, the people of Salmon began several years ago to think about an appropriate commemoration of the Bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. It was decided that Salmon would build a Sacajawea\* Interpretive Center because this was, after all, her homeland. A committee was organized to work out the details of finding a suitable site and raising money to pay for it. The center opened in 2003. Funds raised from the sale of this book go to support the center.

I had been hired by the Salmon Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management to assist this committee and to do research on the Expedition in preparation for the Bicentennial. Generous portions of the Lewis and Clark Trail are on land managed by the BLM.

One of the first research projects I completed was to gather into one document all the written historical references to Sacajawea / Sacagawea / Sakakawea. While doing this research I naturally learned more about the other members of the Expedition. It occurred to me that I had a lot to learn and that there were good stories to be told about all of them. Like so many others before me, I ignored the warning signs and developed a full-blown,



---

chronic addiction to the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

I asked Rick Hodges, publisher and editor of the Recorder Herald, if he would print my short biographical profiles of the members of the Corps of Discovery in his paper on a weekly basis. He said yes. And I got to work.

After a number of articles had been published, local readers began to ask me if I had thought about publishing the articles as a collection in book format. At first I dismissed the idea because I thought I had done pretty much all I could do with the material. Then the BLM asked me to submit the articles for posting on the BLM web site.

As I read over the articles I had completed to that point, I began to realize that my own understanding about the Corps had evolved. I was becoming aware of themes and relationships that were perhaps less than profound, but nevertheless deepened my appreciation for the members of the Expedition as individuals. I'd love to tell you about them.

\*Many readers are aware of the controversy over whether the Shoshone Sacajawea or Hidatsa Sacagawea or Sakakawea should be used when the Expedition's Shoshone interpreter is discussed. Sacajawea is used at the interpretive center in Salmon because it focuses upon her Shoshone heritage. Most historians prefer Sacagawea and that is the name found in the Expedition's journals. Readers may not be aware of a third name, Janey. It is

also found in the journals and in a letter William Clark wrote to Charbonneau shortly after parting with the interpreter and his family in August 1806. This seems to have been an affectionate nickname used at least by Charbonneau and Clark, if not the others. It's also my choice because, vicariously, I've come to share the affection. Nor do I want the conflict to get in the way of the story.

#### **Dedication**

This book is dedicated to the memories of the men, woman, and child of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. I'll see you at the pass.

#### **Thanks**

I want to thank the BLM for its support, particularly Antonia Hedrick, without whom you would not be holding this book.

John Francis did a fantastic job with this book design. The design created the necessary continuity to an assortment of historic images chosen for each chapter. In the end, I am proud of the result.

And I'm grateful to Michael Haynes, the artist who has taken us closer to the Expedition than we've ever been before.

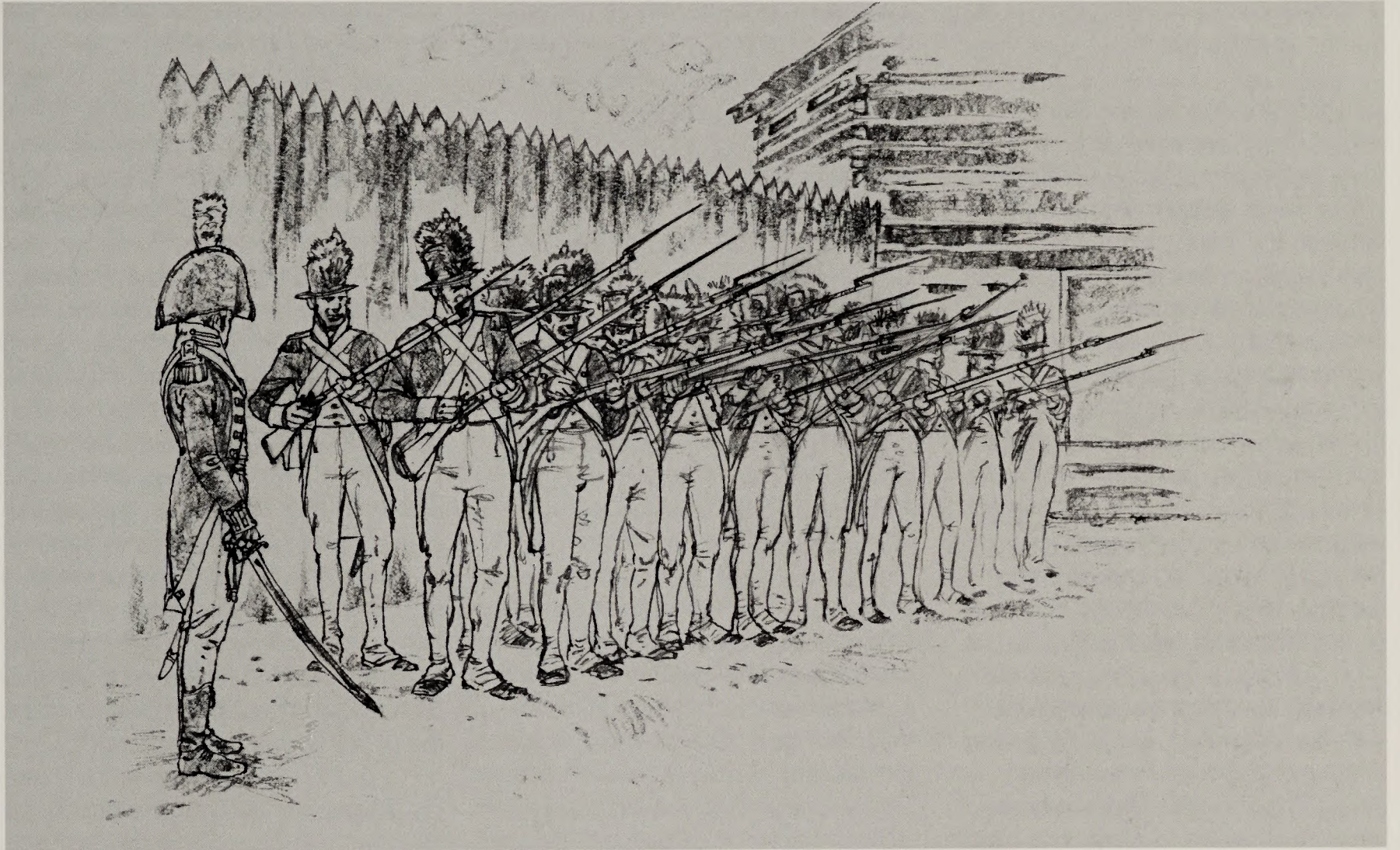
And to Tom Hearne, for his inspiration.

#### **Mike Crosby**



# 1

# The Selection of the Members of the Corps of Discovery



*An infantry platoon in full dress uniform practices the manual of arms at a western fort. Units such as this supplied the majority of the members of the Corps of Discovery.*

The Lewis and Clark Expedition began at least two decades before the first oar stroke dimpled the surface of the Missouri River in the spring of 1804. In December 1783 Thomas Jefferson, the "author" of the Expedition, was in Annapolis, Maryland, representing Virginia in the Congress of the United States. The final draft of the treaty with Great Britain ending our War of Independence had arrived from Paris and would shortly be ratified by Congress. Although the treaty established the Mississippi River as the western border of the United States and the

Great Lakes as the northern, Jefferson believed that the British would disregard the border to continue their fur trade among the Indian nations of the upper Missouri River.<sup>1</sup>

Two decades before President Jefferson purchased the former French territory of Louisiana, Representative Jefferson realized that the West was critical to the United States' future security. But first it must be explored. In 1783 no American knew much about the western half of North America between the lower Missouri River and



a narrow strip of coastline from California to Alaska.

Jefferson first approached George Rogers Clark, who was one of William Clark's older brothers and the officer whose forces had secured the land between the Appalachians and Mississippi for the United States. In a letter written on December 4, 1783, Jefferson asked Clark if he would be willing to lead an American expedition.<sup>2</sup> Clark was interested, but his sorry financial affairs required his attention. He did advise Jefferson, however, to limit the size of the exploring party to three or four young men: "large parties will never answer the purpose. They will alarm the Indian Nations they pass through."<sup>3</sup>

Jefferson discussed solo expeditions with two other men, but nothing came of them.<sup>4</sup> Yet his interest remained strong. He collected maps and books about North America. Most were highly speculative, and much of the speculation concerned the mythical Northwest Passage, that water route across North America that existed simply because it had to be there. In 1792 American seafarer Robert Gray and Captain George Vancouver of the British Navy opened a window in the West when they discovered the mouth of the Columbia River.<sup>5</sup> No one knew yet where the source of the Columbia might lie, but some speculated that the elusive Northwest Passage might involve a short portage.

It stood to reason that the two great rivers, the Missouri and Columbia, must originate near a common "height of

land." Thus, an ascent of the Missouri to its westernmost source and a short portage across the height of land would bring a traveler to an eastern tributary of the Columbia, if not the Columbia itself. Whether this height of land was a broad upland plateau from which both major systems descended, or something like the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia, was subject for speculation. But it surely was there.

In 1800, Jefferson was elected to the first of his two terms as President. Shortly before his inauguration, Jefferson invited Captain Meriwether Lewis to join him as his private secretary. Lewis's family had been friends with the Jeffersons for decades in the Charlottesville area. Lewis had expressed an interest in exploration as a young man and Jefferson believed that the young officer was the man for the job.<sup>6</sup> The abilities Jefferson saw in Lewis are described in a letter Jefferson wrote to Benjamin S. Barton of the University of Pennsylvania on February 27, 1803:

*I have appointed Cap't Lewis, my secretary, to conduct it [the expedition]. It is impossible to find a character who to a complete science in botany, natural history, mineralogy [sic], & astronomy, joined the firmness of constitution and character, prudence, habits adopted to the woods, & familiarity with the Indian manners & character, requisite for this undertaking.<sup>7</sup>*

For the better part of two years, Lewis lived in the still unfinished Executive

Mansion, the sole member of the student body of Jefferson University.

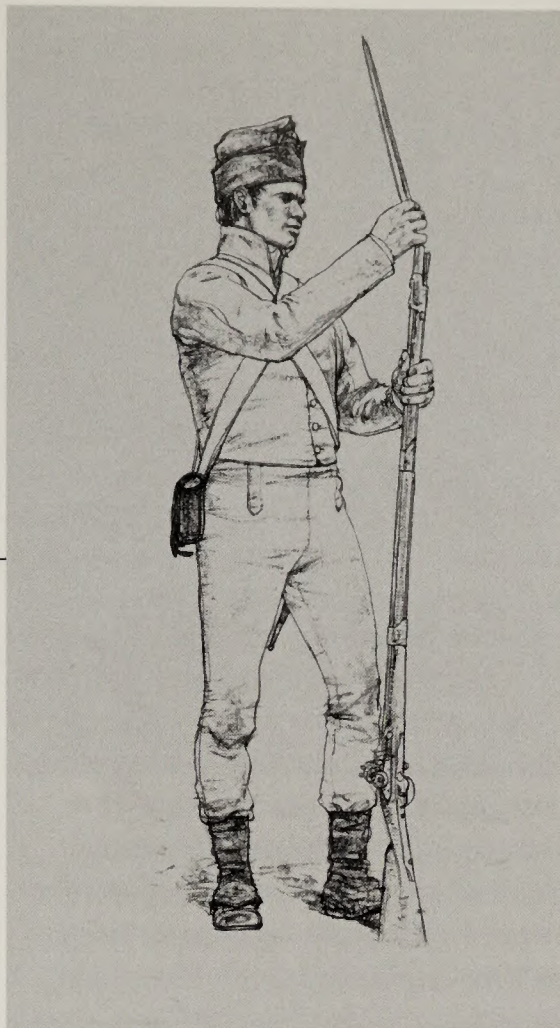
Jefferson and Lewis were at Monticello in the summer of 1802 when Jefferson received a copy of Alexander Mackenzie's book describing his expedition across the Canadian Rockies to the Pacific in 1793. Mackenzie, member of the Canadian North West Company, had not found the Northwest Passage, nor had he proved it didn't exist. Most important, it galvanized Jefferson's determination to initiate an American expedition.<sup>8</sup> [While we must always remember that the western land sought by the United States and Great Britain was already occupied by Indian nations, the question Jefferson faced in 1803 was not whether or not another nation would claim sovereignty over Indian land, but whether that nation would be the United States or Britain.]

On January 18, 1803, Jefferson sent a confidential message to Congress. He proposed to send "an intelligent officer with ten or twelve chosen men" up the Missouri, where they would "have conferences with the Indians on the subject of commercial intercourse, get admission among them for our traders as others are admitted." The party might then go on to explore "even to the Western ocean...and return with the information acquired in the course of two years." Stressing commerce was the right way to approach Congress, but not the other nations concerned.<sup>9</sup>

In 1800 Napoleon Bonaparte recovered Louisiana from Spain for France, but the official transfer of authority had



The linen fatigue uniform worn by soldiers at the time of the Expedition. This soldier's musket is the "model 1795," which was a knock-off of the French 1763 Charleville model. [Robert Moore, Jr. and Michael Haynes, *Tailor Made, Trail Worn*] Although muskets were not as accurate as rifles for hunting big game, they could be loaded with buckshot for bird shooting.



not yet taken place. The Spaniards, who owned what would become the American Southwest and California, were less than enthusiastic about Americans venturing beyond the Mississippi. If American explorers reached and crossed the "height of land" between the Missouri and Columbia rivers, they would enter a wilderness never before seen by Europeans, but nonetheless "claimed" by Great Britain, Spain, and Russia. And all along the route they would also pass through lands occupied by Indian nations. Thus the expedition Jefferson was preparing Lewis to lead was much more than a scientific adventure. There were military, political, economic, and diplomatic complications.<sup>10</sup>

Congress agreed to the expedition. By the time spring came to the Appalachians, Lewis was immersed in preparations for the expedition. Already the size of the party had grown beyond Jefferson's initial estimate of ten men. Lewis intended to seek recruits from the Army, but he also planned to enlist skilled "woodsmen" not yet in uniform. He went to the armory at Harper's Ferry to select weapons—rifles, tomahawks, and knives—and other gear for fifteen men. While there he also supervised the construction of one of the few failures of the expedition, an iron-framed portable canoe.<sup>11</sup>

The U.S. Army had just three regiments in 1803. Two were infantry and one was artillery: altogether a little over three thousand men. Most of them were spread thinly among forts guarding the nations' borders. At Fort Massac

on the Ohio River and Fort Kaskaskia on the Mississippi River—garrisons from whom Lewis would recruit men—there were, respectively, eighty and sixty-one men in 1804.<sup>12</sup> Lewis wrote to the commanders of the western garrisons, describing the kind of men he wanted and asking them to seek "such volunteers as will answer that description.... The men in every instance are to be engaged conditionally, or subject to my approval."<sup>13</sup> Lewis had no intention of allowing officers the opportunity to give him their misfits.

The President also authorized Lewis to engage a second officer. Lewis wrote to William Clark, a friend and former army officer who was living at the time at the falls of the Ohio in Clarksville, Indiana Territory. Clark had been a young boy when Jefferson approached his older brother George Rogers two decades earlier about leading a western expedition. After whetting Clark's appetite with a lengthy description of his plans for the journey, Lewis issued an invitation:

*If therefore there is anything under those circumstances, in this enter-*

*prise, which would induce you to participate with me in it's fatigues, it's dangers, and it's honors, believe me there is no man on earth with whom I should feel equal pleasure in sharing them as with yourself.*<sup>14</sup>

A day after receiving Lewis's letter, Clark accepted Lewis's offer. Clark had spent the previous several years trying to help brother George Rogers Clark settle his debts. To raise some capital, Clark himself had been forced to sell the farm his parent's had willed to him.<sup>15</sup> But it would be doing Clark an injustice to suggest that money was his sole motivation:

*The enterprise &c. is Such as I have long anticipated and am much pleased with...I will cheerfully join you...and partake of the dangers, difficulties, and fatigues, and I anticipate the honors & rewards of the result of such an enterprise...no man lives whith whome I would perfer to undertake such a Trip &c as your self...*<sup>16</sup>

One of the reasons Lewis wanted Clark was that Clark would be able to enlist the woodsmen Lewis wanted. In addition to the ten to twelve soldiers specified by Jefferson, Lewis wrote Clark, he had also been "authorized to engage any other men not soldiers that I may think usefull in promoting the objects of success of this expedition." To attract volunteers, the government was offering several "inducements:"



1. *an enlistment bounty to those who were not yet in the army,*
2. *six months pay in advance,*
3. *discharge from the army following the expedition to those who desired it, with the wages and other benefits that had accrued during the expedition, and*
4. *"a portion of land equal to that given to the officers and soldiers who served in the revolutionary army."*

He asked Clark's help in finding the kind of man he wanted for the expedition:

*It shall be my duty to find out and engage some good hunters, stout, healthy, unmarried, accustomed to the woods and capable of bearing bodily fatigue to a considerable degree; should any young men answering this description be found in your neighborhood I would thank you to give information of them on my arrival at the falls of the Ohio; and if possible learn the probability of their engaging in this service...<sup>17</sup>*

"Arrival at the falls of the Ohio" represented a change of plans for Lewis, who had originally intended to descend the Cumberland River from Nashville, Tennessee. He had hoped to commission the construction of a large keelboat at Nashville and to enlist a crew for the boat from the garrison at South West Point near Knoxville. But Lewis learned that a keelboat was not to be had at Nashville and he decided to begin his voyage at Pittsburgh on

the Ohio River and pick Clark up at the Falls of the Ohio.<sup>18</sup>

Lewis and Clark would stop at two posts on their way to St. Louis. Fort Massac was located on the Illinois shore of the Ohio opposite present day Paducah, Kentucky. Fort Kaskaskia was on the Illinois side of the Mississippi about sixty miles below St. Louis. Secretary of War Henry Dearborn authorized Lewis on July 2, 1803, to "call on the Commanding Officers at [Forts] Massac and Kaskaskais [sic] for such Non-commissioned officers & privates as will be necessary to accompany you on your tour to the Westward."<sup>19</sup> Captain Daniel Bissell commanded a company of the 1st U.S. Infantry Regiment at Fort Massac. His brother, Captain Russell Bissell, commanded another company of the 1st at Fort Kaskaskia. Captain Amos Stoddard's company of artilleryists was also at Kaskaskia. On July 2 Dearborn also sent orders to the three commanders to give Lewis:

*all the aid in your power in selecting suitable men.... If any non-commissioned officer or private in your company should be disposed to join Capt. Lewis, whose characters for sobriety, integrity and other necessary qualifications render them suitable for such service, you will detach them accordingly.<sup>20</sup>*

During that same month, exciting news arrived from France. Napoleon Bonaparte was willing to sell Louisiana to the United States. For fifteen million dollars the United States bought the

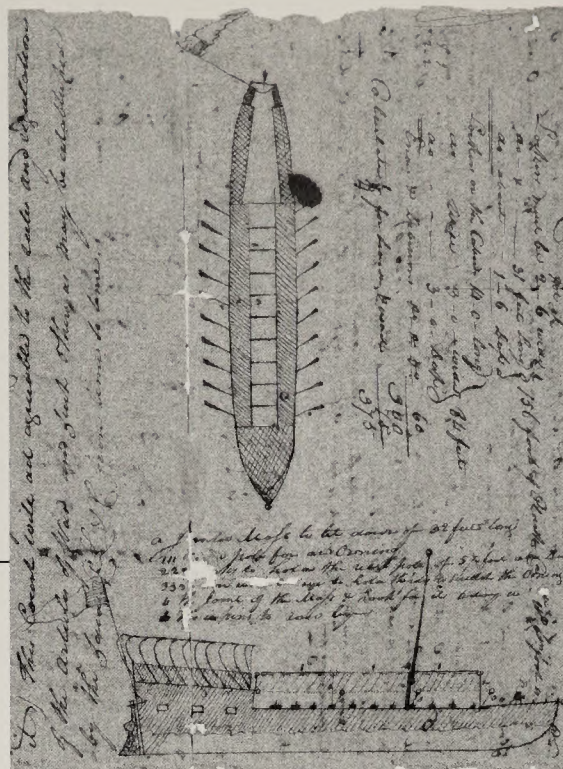
Missouri River and its watershed. The French emperor, it seemed, needed money to finance his European wars more than he needed a tract of wilderness an ocean and half a continent away from Paris. This diplomatic success altered the nature of the coming Expedition, particularly in respect to the Indian nations the Corps of Discovery would encounter as they journeyed to the headwaters of the Missouri. Lewis and Clark had become representatives of a new government responsible for opening diplomatic relations with Indian nations who were both "sovereign" and subject to this new government. The Louisiana Purchase may also have increased the size of the Corps of Discovery. As Lewis and Clark scholar Arlen J. Large put it, "*There would be no diplomatic need to skimp on manpower during the first season's travel up the Missouri.*"<sup>21</sup>

Lewis spent the summer of 1803 absorbing all he could from the country's foremost authorities in surveying, medicine, and the sciences to prepare his mind for the expedition. He procured the supplies, medicines, instruments, trade goods, and camp equipment required for the voyage and arranged for shipment of his freight across the Appalachians by wagon to Pittsburgh. Lewis commissioned at Pittsburgh the construction of a large keelboat that would carry much of the cargo.<sup>22</sup>

By late July 1803 William Clark had "temporarily engaged" several young woodsmen. When the word got around that Clark was hiring hands for a trip



Launched at Pittsburgh on the last day of August, 1803, the Expedition's keelboat would travel the Ohio, Mississippi, and Missouri rivers before disappearing from history.



across the continent, he had plenty of applicants, but not all of them were suitable. Several "young gentlemen" had approached Clark and been rejected.<sup>23</sup> Lewis approved:

*...I am well pleased that you have not admitted or encouraged the young gentlemen you mention, we must set our faces against all such applications and get rid of them on the best terms we can. They will not answer purposes: if a good hunter or two could be conditionally engaged, I would think them an acquisition, they must however bear a portion of the labour in common with the party.<sup>24</sup>*

"Labour in common" is critical to an understanding of the Expedition and is an early indication of Lewis's talent for command. The woodsmen that Clark contributed to the Expedition could have been organized as an elite group responsible solely for the adventurous side of the Expedition: hunting and scouting. But Lewis was certainly familiar with one of the oldest gripes of the soldier: discrimination. About to embark on an expedition unprecedented in American history, Lewis wisely sought to eliminate potential causes of bad morale.

Lewis told Clark that he would leave Pittsburgh with a crew of eight or nine soldiers who would "manage the boat" to the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi, but would not remain as members of the permanent party. It's likely that these men were the soldiers ordered to Pittsburgh by Lt. Col. Thomas

H. Cushing on June 20.<sup>25</sup> Lewis had hoped to start down the Ohio in early August, but that proved impossible. The man he had hired to build the keelboat was an irresponsible drunk who nonetheless understood the law of supply and demand. He took full advantage of the fact that it was too late in the year for Lewis to engage another crew. Lewis fumed and raged, to no effect.<sup>26</sup>

The keelboat was launched on the last day of August and Lewis got underway down the Ohio as quickly as possible. He had a crew of eleven men, seven of whom were soldiers who would leave the Expedition at the mouth of the Ohio River. The other four were a pilot and "three young men on trial [,] they having proposed to go with me throughout the voyage."<sup>27</sup> We can't say for certain, but it's quite possible that two of the three "young men" were George Shannon and John Colter. If so, they were the third and fourth additions to the Expedition. Lewis also had Seaman, a Newfoundland dog he had purchased.<sup>28</sup>

The Ohio River was so low by that time that Lewis was compelled to buy a large rowboat or "pirogue" at Wheeling to carry some of the baggage and lighten the keelboat.<sup>29</sup> Even then it was necessary at times to unload cargo and portage it around shoals and rapids. Lewis wrote to Jefferson from Cincinnati on October 3 that his men

were "much fatigued with the labour to which they have been subjected in descending the river."<sup>30</sup>

It took Lewis over a month to reach the Falls of the Ohio at Clarksville, Indiana. William Clark was waiting with several young Kentuckians. They were John Shields, George Gibson, Charles Floyd, Nathaniel Pryor, William Bratton, and the brothers Reuben and Joseph Field. With Shannon and Colter, they are known as the "nine young men from Kentucky." York, Clark's slave and manservant, also came aboard.<sup>31</sup>

The Lewis and Clark Expedition reached Ft. Massac on the lower Ohio on the 11th of November.<sup>32</sup> Three men joined the Expedition there. Privates Joseph Whitehouse and John Newman were members of Captain Daniel Bissell's company.<sup>33</sup> Bissell also recommended a civilian interpreter at the fort, George Drouillard.<sup>34</sup> Drouillard was half Shawnee, half French, and skilled in Indian sign language. Lewis gave Drouillard a \$30 salary advance and sent him to South West Point in Tennessee to pick up a squad of recruits that Lewis had expected to be waiting for him at Fort Massac. Drouillard and these men would rendezvous with the rest of the Corps at Cahokia, Illinois.<sup>35</sup>

Lewis, Clark, York, Whitehouse, Newman, the "nine young men from Kentucky," and Seaman floated the keelboat and pirogue down to the mouth of the Ohio River and turned north up the Mississippi. Two years would pass before they again experienced the luxury of gliding with the



current down a river. At this point, the soldiers who had been with Lewis since Pittsburgh apparently left the Expedition and proceeded on to their new posts. The commanders' next opportunity to recruit soldiers was at Fort Kaskaskia on the east bank of the Mississippi. Captain Russell Bissell's company of the 1st U.S. Infantry contributed Sgt. John Ordway and privates Patrick Gass, John Boley, Peter Weiser, and, probably, John Collins and Richard Windsor. From Captain Amos Stoddard's artillery company came privates John Dame, John Robinson, Ebenezer Tuttle, Isaac White, and, John Thompson.<sup>36</sup>

Lewis and Clark may also have hired several French "engages" or boatmen at Kaskaskia, including Francois Labiche, who would later become a permanent member of the Corps.

When the Corps of Discovery pulled away from Ft. Kaskaskia, it numbered at least twenty men. Lewis informed Jefferson in a letter written on December 19th that at Kaskaskia he had "made a selection of a sufficient number of men from the troops of that place to complete my party."<sup>37</sup> This may be interpreted to mean enough men to get the boats to their eventual winter quarters, not enough for the expedition itself. He didn't tell Jefferson how many men that might be, nor had he, in fact, yet "completed" his party.

The closest we may come to an explanation for the growth of the Corps beyond its intended size may be remarks Clark made in 1810 to Nicholas Biddle, who had taken on the work of

editing the journals of Lewis and Clark for publication. According to the notes Biddle took in his interviews with Clark, Clark explained that:

*These addns. to the party were for carrying the stores as well as for protection in case of hostilities from the Indians who were most to be dreaded from Wood river to the Mandans.*<sup>38</sup>

Since the stores or baggage of the Expedition would be carried on boats, Lewis and Clark needed enough men to manage those boats going against the current in first the Mississippi and then the Missouri Rivers. As for Indian hostilities, the officers had heard and would hear more about the Sioux tribes along the Missouri, who were reported to be numerous, well-armed, and determined to maintain control of the river.<sup>39</sup>

From Ft. Kaskaskia Clark assumed command of the boats and their crews while Lewis set out on horseback for St. Louis. There Lewis with officials and sought information as to a suitable location for the Corps to construct winter quarters. Lewis rejoined the Expedition on December 9th at Cahokia, a village on the Illinois side of the Mississippi opposite St. Louis. He had learned that a tract of land was available at the mouth of the Wood River, several miles north of Cahokia.<sup>40</sup>

When the Corps reached the site on December 12th, Clark wrote in his journal, a wind that had been blowing hard and cold from the northwest all day "increased to a Storm which was

accompanied by Hail & snow, & the wind continued to blow from the same point with violence."<sup>41</sup> On the 13th the soldiers began to clear land and cut logs for the construction of Camp Wood or Camp Dubois, as it is also known. George Drouillard arrived from Tennessee on the 22nd with eight men.<sup>42</sup> Four were judged unsuitable and sent on their way, but Corporal Richard Warfington and privates Thomas Howard, Hugh Hall, and John Potts were enrolled in the Corps of Discovery.<sup>43</sup>

By the end of January the names of several more men of uncertain origin began to appear on Corps rosters. They were privates Robert Frazer, Silas Goodrich, Hugh McNeal, Moses Reed, and William Werner. Jefferson's theoretical "intelligent officer with ten or twelve chosen men" had become in reality two officers and over thirty enlisted men. Two-thirds of them were soldiers in the regular army, the rest civilians who had been chosen for their proven ability to survive in the outdoors. Lewis spent most of the winter of 1803-4 in St. Louis making final arrangements for the Expedition. There were still men to hire.



## 2

The French  
"Engages"

*river Still rise & Ice pass down the greater part of  
the Missouries*

—WILLIAM CLARK. FEBRUARY 9, 1804.<sup>1</sup>



*The French engages were distinguished by their language, customs, and dress, all of which added color to the Expedition.*

*In this scene, three engages bow their heads in respect at the funeral of Sgt. Charles Floyd.*

[Plate 143]

During the winter of 1803–4 at Camp Wood, the men of the Corps of Discovery studied the Missouri River at the point where it entered the Mississippi. The Missouri was the object of their expedition, from its mouth here to its source—where? No European-American had ever been there. But the lower river was known. Meriwether

Lewis had already decided that the Corps would need to hire the men who knew the river best. "...4 or five french water-men I conceive will be essential," Lewis had written in a letter to Clark. "This we can do I presume very readily at St. Louis."<sup>2</sup> Lewis was right about St. Louis, but "water-men?" No, they were "engages," hired men. The record is not clear, but it's possible that some of the engages may have been hired when the Corps stopped at Ft. Kaskaskia in November, 1803. Since there is no record of them at Camp Wood, they may have spent the winter in St. Louis or another river town. There was certainly no compelling reason to play soldier out in the woods all winter.

The engages haven't received much attention. We know more about their lives before and after the Expedition than we do of their time with Lewis and Clark. What information we have about some them is derived from their birth in Catholic communities where parish baptismal and marriage records were kept. Their civilian status, their ethnic background, and their lack of English consigned them to the background of the Expedition. But the French-Canadians were the best in the business, and had been for generations.

The nature of the Missouri River itself was the most formidable challenge. Meriwether Lewis would later declare that "we have experienced more diffi-



culty from the navigation of the Missouri, than danger from the Savages." The primary difficulties, wrote Lewis, were:

*...the rapidity of its current, it's [sic] falling banks, sandbars, and timber which remains wholly, or partially concealed in its bed.... One of these difficulties, the navigator never ceases to contend with...and in innumerable instances most of these obstructions are at the sam[e] instant combined to oppose his progress, or threaten his destruction.*<sup>3</sup>

The force of the river's current generally made it impossible to row a boat upstream in the main channel. Instead, an experienced man in the bow of a boat directed its course for the side channels and eddies that slowed or even reversed the current. The keelboat and two pirogues carried sails, which were used when the wind was right. But muscle power was the usual means of advance: oars, poles, and ropes.<sup>4</sup>

The engages could also help Lewis and Clark in their meetings with the Indian nations they encountered on the Missouri. It had long been the practice of French voyageurs and traders to take Indian women as wives and participate in the social life of the tribes. This was good politics and good business. Several of Lewis's engages were known among the tribes along the lower river. The Choteaus, a "founding family" of St. Louis whose boats regularly plied the lower

Missouri, provided most of the engages for the Expedition.<sup>5</sup>

Lewis tried to get them to continue with the Expedition beyond the Mandan villages in present day North Dakota, but they refused. Lewis sent the engages in the Corps' red pirogue with George Drouillard as an escort from St. Louis to Clark at Camp Wood, where they arrived on May 11.<sup>6</sup> Clark said that seven arrived, but the count varied between seven and nine in the journals. So did the spelling of their names. Lewis and Clark, especially Clark, had trouble in spelling English names correctly. William Clark turned loose with pen and ink on a strange name in a foreign accent is not a prospect for the faint of heart. For example, one of the voyageurs is recorded variously as Malboeuf, Mabbau, Malbeuf, and Mallat.

On July 4, Clark listed the following "Ingishees or Hirelens" [engages or hirelings]:

*Battist de Shone Patr  
Joseph Le bartee  
Lasoness  
Paul Preemau  
Chalo  
E. Cann  
Roie  
Charlo Cougee<sup>7</sup>*

["Preemau" and two men not on the above list may have joined the Expedition at Kaskaskia in November 1803. See below.]

During their service with the Expedition there are few references to the engages in the journals and those are surprisingly negative. For example:

May 28, 1804 [Clark]  
*"onloaded the large Perogue on board of which was 8 French hands found many things wet by their carelessness, put all the articles which was wet out to dry."*<sup>8</sup>

June 17, 1804 [Clark]  
*"The French higherlins Complain for the want of Provisions, Saying they are accustomed to eat 5 @ 6 times a day, they are roughly rebuked for their presumption."*<sup>9</sup>

On August 28th the engages came close to sinking the red pirogue when they ran it into a snag on the river. Some of the freight in the boat was also damaged. What was salvaged was transferred to the other boats. Following several days of heavy rain in mid-September, the Corps took a day off to dry damp cargo. Apparently the red pirogue had not been damaged too badly because Lewis and Clark decided to transfer to it some of the keelboat's cargo.<sup>10</sup>

The entries raise a question that probably can't be answered: just how good were these men? Were they victims of circumstance or did the Choteau family send the Expedition its misfits? Or was Clark prejudiced toward them? We can see in Clark's response to the engages' request for more frequent meals that the officers were in earnest with their insistence upon no special privileges.



The engages would take their meals when the soldiers took theirs.

The French engages with the Expedition were:

**Francois Rivet** was one of the most fascinating members of the Expedition. To begin with, he was in his late 40s but could dance around on his hands, his moccasins at eye level, a stunt that delighted his audiences. Rivet was born in 1757, making him perhaps the oldest man on the Expedition. He had apparently made a living as a hunter and trader in the Mississippi valley for years before joining the Corps at Kaskaskia. On their return trip the Corps of Discovery met Rivet and two other trappers on August 21, 1806, on the Missouri below the Mandan villages. They told the captains what they knew of Indian politics downstream and departed with a gift of powder and balls. According to Sgt. John Ordway, Rivet and his partners had been trapping the Missouri as far up as the Yellowstone River. Having "made out but poorly," in Ordway's words, they were thinking of going on down to St. Louis.

He was close to fifty years old but the West wouldn't let Francois Rivet alone. By the year 1810 he was working for the North West Company among the Salish nation in northwestern Montana. He worked as an interpreter for Alexander Ross and others. In 1832, at the age of seventy-five, he was managing Ft. Colville in present day Washington State for the Hudson's Bay Company. Six years later he retired to the Willamette River valley in Oregon,

where he finally died in 1852, aged ninety-five. Ah, if those old bones could tell stories.<sup>11</sup>

**Alexander Carson** [Carrn, etc.] ["E Cann"] Did an older cousin of Kit Carson go west with Lewis and Clark twenty years before Kit headed for the Rockies? Possibly. If so, this Carson was born about 1775 to Alexander Carson, Sr., older brother of Kit's father Lindsey. Alexander Sr. settled in Mississippi about 1760, so it's possible that his son, though not French, could have become a voyageur. He is thought to have spent the winter of 1809–1810 at the Arikara villages and may have been one of the party under Nathaniel Pryor who returned the Mandan chief Sheheke to his people. A decade later he was working for the Hudson's Bay Company in Oregon, perhaps as a gunsmith. Indians killed him in 1836.<sup>12</sup>

**Jean Baptiste Deschamps** ["Battist de Shone Patrnr?"] was the lead boatman or "patroon" of the red pirogue manned by the engages. He may have been the son of a man bearing the same name and a woman named Marie Pinot. He apparently lived in Kaskaskia, Illinois, and St. Charles, Missouri.<sup>13</sup>

**Jean Baptiste La Jeunesse** ["Lasoness?"] was perhaps born in St. Rose, Quebec. In 1797 he married Elisabeth Malboeuf, the French/Mandan sister of fellow voyageur Etienne Malboeuf. The couple had three children. All were baptized at St. Charles. He was probably dead by 1807 because his wife remarried that year.<sup>14</sup>

**Etienne Malboeuf**, Jean Baptiste La Jeunesse's brother-in-law, was born in Lac de Sable, Quebec. Malboeuf's father, Francois, had at least seven children by various Indian women. Etienne was baptized at St. Charles in 1792, but his age was not recorded. He may have been living at Kaskaskia when the Corps of Discovery stopped there on their way up the Mississippi in the fall of 1803. It's possible that he signed on at that time, but there's no clear evidence that he did.<sup>15</sup>

**Peter Pinaut or Charles Pineau** was born about 1776 to an unnamed woman of the Missouri tribe and Joseph Pineau. He is not listed in the journals after June 1804. He may have been sent back to St. Louis in June with Private John Robinson.<sup>16</sup>

**Charles Caugee** ["Charlo Cougee"?] is listed on July 4, but not thereafter.<sup>17</sup>

**Paul Primeau** ["Paul Preemau"] was a native of Chateauguay, Quebec. He was in St. Louis by 1799, when he married Pelagie Bissonet. The couple had ten children. Two of his sons, Joseph and Charles, were later traders on the Missouri. Like Etienne Malboeuf, he may have joined the Expedition at Kaskaskia.<sup>18</sup>

**Charles Hebert** ["Chalo"?] was perhaps the Canadian voyageur of that name who in 1792 married a woman named Julie Hubert dit La Croix in St. Louis. That couple had eleven children who were baptized at either St. Charles or Portage des Sioux, a village north of St. Charles on the Mississippi River.<sup>19</sup>



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**Peter [Pierre] Roi** ["Roie"?] was a common name among the early French families who migrated from Quebec to the Mississippi valley in the 18th century. One possibility is a man born in 1786 to Pierre Roy and Marie Jeanne La Lande, who were married in 1776 at St. Genevieve, Missouri. This Peter Roi would have been one of the youngest members of the Expedition.<sup>20</sup>

**Joseph Collin** may have been the son of Joseph and Marie Dier Collin of St. Genevieve de Montreal, Canada. It is perhaps Collin that Ordway refers to on October 10, 1804, as remaining behind at the Arikara villages.<sup>21</sup>

**Joseph La Liberte** ["Joseph Le bar-tee"?] was sent by Lewis and Clark on July 29, 1804, to invite the Oto chiefs to a council. The Corps of Discovery was then camped in the vicinity of present Council Bluffs. Like most of his voyageur colleagues, La Liberte had considerable experience on the Missouri River. He may have been among the Otoes long enough to learn the language, an act second only to marrying into a tribe as a sound business practice for a trader. That could account for his being dispatched with the invitation. It was a critical assignment because the Otoes were the first Indian nation the Corps met on the river and they wanted to make the right impression. Four days passed, and La Liberte failed to return. Clark wrote in his August 3rd journal that "The man Liberty whom we sent for the Ottoes has not come up.... This man has either tired his horse or lost himself in the Plains." Clark was too gen-

erous. Joseph La Liberte had liberated himself from the Expedition.<sup>22</sup>

The engages still with the Expedition were discharged when the Corps of Discovery reached the Mandan villages in late October. Some were apparently paid their wages in cash then, but Lewis had made arrangements for several others to be paid when they returned to St. Louis. Some of the engages, including probably Paul Primeau and Jean Baptiste La Jeunesse, built a dugout canoe and set out down the river in November. They most likely stopped with the Arikaras for the winter and continued down to St. Louis in the spring. Jean Baptiste Deschamps, Etienne Malboeuf, and Francois Rivet may have built a hut and wintered near Ft. Mandan.<sup>23</sup>

Our appreciation of the Lewis and Clark Expedition is incomplete without some understanding of the role played by the French engages in 1804. They taught the Corps of Discovery something about rivers. We'll leave the engages camped on a Missouri River sandbar one evening in the late summer of 1804. After a supper of bison and corn soup, they gather at a campfire to sip the daily tot of rum from a tin cup. The sand is still a little warm from the afternoon sun and feels good under sore muscles. They tell jokes about the incidents of the day and speculate on the challenges the river will bring them tomorrow. Jean Baptiste is in the mood for music and he fetches his fiddle. As the first stars smolder into the indigo sky in the east, the first few notes and then the words

of an old French song drift across the river and over the infinite plains.



# 3

## A Brief Narrative of the Expedition

*Captains Lewis & Clark holding  
a Council with the Indians.*

[Mathew Carey edition of Patrick  
Gass journal, 1810]

*With few exceptions, the Corps of  
Discovery's relationships with the  
Indian nations were peaceful and  
cordial. Their assistance was critical  
to the Expedition's success.*



The hiring of the French engages completed the roster of the Expedition. It was time to go. On May 14, 1804, the Corps of Discovery left Camp Wood, rowed across the Mississippi River, and headed up the Missouri. The French engages rowed one of the pirogues. The "return party manned the other." Lewis and Clark planned to send one of the boats back down the river after they had reached the site they would select for winter quarters. The return party would be responsible for carrying letters, journals, Indian artifacts, and the plant, animal, and mineral specimens collected to that point safely back to St. Louis and points east. The men who had been assigned to the permanent party of the Expedition manned the keelboat, the Corps of Discovery's largest vessel.

Storms, heat, and humidity bedeviled the men as they rowed, sailed, poled, and pulled their boats upriver. Signs of civilization gradually subsided: small settlements, isolated cabins. The travails of the Corps were lightened by their appreciation of the beauty of the land. Conscious, and perhaps a little proud, of their first passage through the newest quarter of the American Eden, these sons of the soil sized up the land and judged it bountiful: fertile, well watered bottomland; navigable rivers; plentiful timber; game and fish aplenty. This was a land fit for farms and towns, for families and opportunities.

It was not until August that the Corps met their first Indians, members of the Missouri and Oto nations. Lewis and Clark had very specific orders from



Jefferson concerning the tribes: establish cordial relations, explain to them the political and economic benefits of a good relationship with the United States, and learn all you can about their cultures. The second conference with the Oto and Missouri was followed shortly by perhaps the greatest tragedy of the Expedition, the death of Sgt. Charles Floyd. His grieving friends did not have the consolation of knowing that Floyd would be the only fatality of the Expedition.

A friendly encounter with the Yankton Sioux in late August was followed by a volatile confrontation with the Teton Sioux in late September. Lewis and Clark were getting an education in Indian politics and diplomacy. By this time the signs of autumn were appearing and, no, they weren't in Kansas anymore. The Missouri River was dropping, the current diminishing. The banks were tree-lined but beyond them now stretched the Great Plains, the North American steppe.

The golden leaves of the cottonwood were floating on the river when the Expedition reached the "capital" of the Upper Missouri in late October. Here in present day North Dakota the Mandans and Hidatsas had built sturdy towns and established a great trade center. British and French Canadians had been coming here for years. These tribes hunted bison on the plains and along the river they grew the Native American "trinity:" corn, beans, and squash.

Lewis and Clark picked a site across the Missouri from one of the largest towns

to build Ft. Mandan. They decided to wait until spring to send the keelboat back to St. Louis. The French engages were paid and discharged. The men had barely begun work on the fort when a French-Canadian interpreter named Toussaint Charbonneau came looking for work. He knew sign language and could speak Hidatsa. His pregnant Shoshone wife, a girl of about sixteen, clinched the deal. Charbonneau called her Janey; the Hidatsas knew her as Sacajawea, "Bird Woman." In Shoshone she is known as Sacajawea. Charbonneau had acquired her from the Hidatsas, who made regular raids upon her tribe in the Rocky Mountains for women, horses, and scalps. "She is from the Rocky Mountains?" Clark and Lewis asked. Yes, her people live at the headwaters of the Missouri and on a river to the west with big fish that returned every summer. My tribe, she told them, are the Agai Dika, the salmon eaters. And, yes, they have good horses.

Ft. Mandan was a stockade of small cabins surrounded by a high log palisade. The Mandans proved to be good neighbors, but the North Dakota winter was colder than the men of the Expedition believed a winter could be. At least there was usually enough to eat. In February Jean Baptiste "Pompey" Charbonneau was born. No one else could claim to have joined the Expedition in that manner.

In April the Corps left Ft. Mandan. The keelboat floated away downstream toward St. Louis. The permanent party loaded the two pirogues and several dugout canoes and set off, once again,

up the Missouri River. They soon entered a land that no European explorers had ever seen. Nor did they encounter any Indians for months as they traveled from one end of present day Montana to the other. Herds of game animals, too many to count, grazed across the plains. They had all the meat they could eat, and they ate a lot.

In early June the Corps was suddenly confronted with a geographical dilemma. During the winter they had gotten some good information from the Indians about the upper Missouri and its major tributaries. But here was a large river entering from the west that they hadn't expected. Several days of reconnoitering satisfied Lewis and Clark that the new river was not the true Missouri, but it was not until Lewis reached the Great Falls on June 13th that everyone was convinced.

Portaging the falls proved to be one of the greatest challenges of the Expedition. The big pirogues obviously couldn't be portaged and were cached for the return voyage. The men made rude carts and hauled the dugouts some nineteen miles across plains and ravines, pestered by mosquitoes, lightning, hail, cactus, rattlesnakes, and grizzly bears. It was a monumental achievement that was soon rewarded by the penetration of the Rocky Mountains west of present day Great Falls.

In late July the Corps arrived at the Three Forks of the Missouri. Lewis and Clark named the three rivers the Jefferson, Madison, and Gallatin for,



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respectively, the President, Secretary of State, and Secretary of the Treasury of the United States. They headed up the Jefferson, which soon split again into three forks. On August 8th Sacagawea recognized the landmark "Beaver's head" and told Lewis and Clark that they were approaching her homeland.

Lewis set out on foot with a small party, leaving Clark and the rest of the Corps to maneuver the canoes as best they could up a river that could hardly be defined as navigable. Lewis and his party followed a well-used Indian road to the continental divide at present day Lemhi Pass on August 12th, 1805. The westward view from the pass was heartbreaking. Where they had expected to see a broad plain through which flowed a navigable river, they saw nothing but a seemingly endless succession of mountain ranges. Hence a major objective of the Expedition had proven to be a fantasy. There was no Northwest Passage here, no easy portage from the Missouri to the Columbia watersheds.

Lewis's party continued west and on the 13th met a band of Shoshones in Idaho's Lemhi River valley. With difficulty he persuaded a small party of Indians to travel with him back over the divide to meet Clark's party and to help the Expedition portage across the divide. The Lemhis thought Lewis might be leading them into a trap. When the chief, Cameahwait, proved to be the brother of Sacagawea, the suspicions of the Shoshones subsided. They helped the Corps cross the pass, provided them a guide for the difficult journey ahead,

and sold them horses to carry their baggage across the mountains. The canoes were left in Montana to be used on the trip home.

The terrible, bushwhacking crossing of Lost Trail Pass to the upper Bitterroot River in Montana was a foretaste of the Lolo Trail across the Bitterroot Mountains. Fortunately, they met a band of Salish Indians and were able to acquire more horses. Although the Shoshone guide Toby got turned around once or twice, he led them safely across the Lolo Trail. But it was a passage of cold, hunger, exposure, and fatigue through mountains that even today are no place for the unprepared.

When they finally left the mountains in the Clearwater River country, they were rescued by another Idaho nation, the Nez Perce. They fed the explorers, agreed to take care of their horses over the winter, and helped them construct new dugout canoes. Here the Expedition for the first time in two years experienced the luxury of descending a river, of having water and gravity as allies. They boomed down the Clearwater, Snake, and Columbia rivers, learned to run rapids, and watched the miles go by.

The millions of salmon who swam up from the Pacific supported many tribes, and the Expedition was seldom out of sight of Indians. The land grew barren and dry and then green again as they entered the estuary of the Columbia in mid-November. Tremendous storms pinned the Corps to miserable shoreline camps amid tossing driftwood for sev-

eral weeks. After scouting for options they voted to spend the winter on the side of the Columbia. They built shelter in a forest cathedral buttressed with massive trees that blocked the sun but only delayed the raindrops.

By Christmas Ft. Clatsop, named for a local tribe, was ready. Cold defined the previous winter at Ft. Mandan. At Clatsop it was rain. It rotted their clothing and spoiled the elk meat. Injuries and illness prostrated many of the men before they eagerly left the fort for the homeward voyage in March 1806. They returned to the Nez Perce in May only to learn from them that there was still too much snow in the mountains to attempt the Lolo Trail.

For a month they camped near present day Kamiah, Idaho, with the Nez Perce. In late June they crossed the trail with the help of Nez Perce guides. At Travelers' Rest near present day Lolo, Montana, Lewis and Clark made final preparations for a whirlwind trip across Montana. There were still many questions to be resolved concerning mountains and rivers. The Nez Perce would show Lewis a much shorter route to the Great Falls than the Corps had followed in 1805. Lewis also wanted to explore the Marias, the mysterious river that had surprised the Corps below the Great Falls the previous summer. Clark would explore the upper Yellowstone River. If all went well, they should reunite on the Missouri River.

The next six weeks were perhaps the most impressive of the entire Expedition. Lewis's detachment went



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overland to the Great Falls. There he left several men to await the arrival of the canoes and set out with a small party to explore the Marias River. Lewis determined the general location of the headwaters of the Marias and, on his way back to the Missouri, had an encounter with a party of Indians that left two warriors dead.

Clark returned to where the canoes had been cached on the upper Beaverhead River the previous summer. Sgt. John Ordway and a detachment floated the canoes down to the Great Falls of the Missouri, where they rendezvoused with the men Lewis had left there while he scouted the Marias. Together the two detachments portaged the canoes around the Great Falls. Near the mouth of the Marias River, they met Lewis's party, who had ridden hard over a hundred miles from the scene of their Indian fight.

Clark and the rest of his detachment went east overland to the Yellowstone River, where they built canoes and started downstream. The Corps were reunited, as planned, below the Yellowstone. In mid-August they reached the Mandan-Hidatsa towns, where they said farewell to the Charbonneau family and John Colter, who had decided to stay and trap beaver.

Their skills sharpened by over two years of experience, the Corps of Discovery glided down the Missouri River in the late summer of 1806 as if they owned it. Not a word had been heard of them since their departure from Ft. Mandan in April 1805. More people had moved

up the Missouri and they were the first to see the return of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Thirty men dug deep into the Missouri on each plunge of paddle and oar. Men half naked in tattered buckskins, brown as Indians, hard muscled, and going home. Nothing done before or since can compare with what they had achieved.

It is time you met the men, woman, and child of the Lewis and Clark Expedition.



## 4

## Sgt. Charles Floyd

20<sup>th</sup> August Monday 1804<sup>13</sup>  
 Sergeant Floyd much weaker  
 and no better. Made W. Shaufman  
 the interpreter a few presents, and  
 the Indians a Canister of Whisky  
 we set out under a gentle breeze  
 from the S.E. and proceeded on  
 very well - Sergeant Floyd as  
 bad as he can be no pulse &  
 nothing will stay a moment  
 on his stomach or bowels -  
 Passed two Islands on the S.S.  
 and at the first Bluff on the  
 S.S. Sgt. Floyd died with a  
 great deal of Composure, before  
 his death he said to me, "I am  
 going away" I want you to write  
 me a letter" - We buried him  
 on the top of the bluff 1/2 mile  
 below a small river to which we  
 gave his name, he was buried  
 with the honors of war much

Clark's journal entry for August 20, 1804, relates the death of Sgt. Charles Floyd. Remarkably, no other member of the Corps died during the Expedition.

On August 11, 1804, Lewis and Clark took time off from their relentless ascent of the Missouri river to make a diplomatic gesture. They visited the grave of Blackbird, former chief of the Omaha tribe. It was no ordinary grave,

but then Blackbird was no ordinary man. He obtained a supply of arsenic from a trader and used it to "magically" dispatch those who displeased him after he had issued a mystical prediction of their coming doom. But when a smallpox epidemic struck the Omaha tribe in 1800, the chief's arsenic could not protect him from his own demise. But Blackbird understood the power of myth and symbol and devised a burial that would approach immortality. Bury me, he ordered, seated horseback on a hill overlooking the Missouri River, where I can survey my kingdom.<sup>1</sup> So the Missouri River lost a despot and gained a tourist attraction.

Clark and Lewis understood the power of symbol, too. They hiked up to the grave and tied a white flag on a pole that stood atop the grave mound. Sgt. Charles Floyd described the event in his journal: "passed a high bluff where the king of the [O]mahas died about four years ago[,] the hill on which he is buried is about 300 feet high[,] Capt. Lewis and Clark went up on the hill to see the Grave[.]"<sup>2</sup>

At twenty-one, Floyd was among the younger members of the Corps. Yet Floyd was promoted to sergeant and given command of one of the Corps' three squads. What did the officers see in Charles Floyd that prompted them to promote him to a position of authority over the likes of John Colter, the Fields brothers, and John Shields, not to mention the dozen or so Corps members who were already in the Army? Floyd was distantly related to Clark, but Lewis was too wise a judge



of men to be easily influenced by nepotism.

The expedition's journals aren't very helpful because there are very few references to Floyd. After the Expedition, Lewis described him as a "young man of much merit."<sup>3</sup> Lewis was stingy with praise, so Charles Floyd must have been special. When Lewis and Clark were absent during the 1803–4 winter at Camp Dubois, their written orders specifically left Sgt. Floyd in charge of the equipment and provisions. He may have carried the same or equivalent responsibilities once the Expedition got underway up the Missouri River.<sup>4</sup>

August 18th, 1804, one week after the visit to Blackbird's grave, was one of the most important days of the Expedition. Chiefs of the Oto tribe began to gather for would be the first formal council Lewis and Clark held with an Indian nation. George Drouillard returned to camp with Private Moses Reed, who had tried but failed to desert the Expedition. And Sgt. Charles Floyd made his last journal entry.<sup>5</sup>

On the morning of the 19th Floyd was stricken with a severe pain in his abdomen. The diagnosis was, in Clark's terms, a "biliose chorlick," or what we might call the bloating and cramps caused by a severe case of constipation. "We attempt to relieve him without success as yet," Clark continued. "He gets worse and we are much alarmed at his Situation, all attention to him." Clark didn't specify what they did to "relieve" Floyd's symptoms, but their usual treatment was a strong purgative

or emetic. If a blockage of the bowels was not the problem, as seems the case, either one would have only increased Floyd's misery.<sup>6</sup> In all fairness to Clark, it should be noted that a person who might have at that time been considered a "highly qualified physician" might very well have made the same diagnosis and administered the same treatment.

Of course, it's not possible to know now exactly what was wrong with Charles Floyd. The most common theory has been that he probably suffered a sudden attack of appendicitis.<sup>7</sup> If this were so, no doctor in America could have saved him. Floyd lingered through the 19th and into the morning of the 20th. Clark, who stayed by his side most of the night, wrote that Floyd "is as bad as he can be to live." It was probably of some comfort to those caring for Floyd that the fever caused by the massive infection caused him to lapse into unconsciousness.<sup>8</sup>

When Floyd awoke that morning, someone suggested that perhaps a warm bath might, in Clark's words, "brace him a little." But before the bath could be prepared, Floyd looked up at Clark. "I am going away," he said. "I want you to write me a letter." They were his last words. Floyd died with what Clark described as "a great deal of composure .... This man at all times gave us proofs of his firmness and determined resolution to do service to his country and honor to himself...." Floyd was the only man to die during the Expedition and the first American soldier to die for his country west of the Mississippi River.<sup>9</sup>

The details of Floyd's funeral are not in the journals. "We buried him with the honours of war," wrote Sgt. John Ordway. Lewis and Clark scholar Robert R. Hunt reconstructed a possible scenario from what is known of military practice of the time. A coffin was built, possibly by carpenter Patrick Gass. The site selected for the grave was the summit of a hill on the east side of the Missouri River near present day Sioux City, Iowa. All the members of the Corps with the exception of a small guard detail left at the boats escorted Floyd's remains from the river to the gravesite in this order: an official escort party, the two officers, six pallbearers with the flag-draped coffin, and the other soldiers. The funeral cortege marched slowly to the gravesite, where the coffin was placed on wood supports over the open grave.

The journals state that Lewis conducted the funeral service, but offer no details as to the contents of the service. He may well have read selections from the Bible or The Book of Common Prayer. Lewis's dignity, gift with language, and particular regard for Charles Floyd should leave us in no doubt that his words would be remembered by the men who heard them. Following the service the flag was removed and the coffin lowered into the grave. Then the escort fired three volleys and the party returned to the boats. The Corps went up the river another mile to make camp at the mouth of a small river flowing into the Missouri from the east.<sup>10</sup> "Our commanding officers gave it the name of Floyd's River," wrote Patrick Gass, "to perpetuate the memory of the



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first man who had fallen in this important expedition."<sup>11</sup>

Floyd's grave became a landmark on the river. His comrades in the Corps stopped to pay their respects on their return voyage on September 6, 1806. They found that the grave had been opened and left "half Covered." According to Clark, a Sioux chief whose son had died placed the boy's remains in Floyd's grave "for the purpose of accompanying him to the other world believing the white man's future state was happier than that of the Savages."<sup>12</sup> [Moulton, Vol. 8, pp. 349-350] By 1857 the Missouri River had eroded the bluff so much that Floyd's remains had begun to slide into the river. Some of the bones, including Floyd's skull, were retrieved and reburied at a site some two hundred yards east of the original grave.

Over the years the grave began to suffer from neglect and souvenir hunters. In 1895, following the first publication of Floyd's journal, Floyd's remains were reburied under a marble slab. In 1901 a one hundred foot high sandstone obelisk was dedicated. For the fourth—and one hopes last—time, Charles Floyd's bones were disinterred and reburied.







## 5

## The Return Party

*From this plase we shall send the [keelboat] and crew early tomorrow morning with orders to proceed as expeditiauly as possible to St. Louis, by her we send our dispatches, which I trust will get safe to hand.*

—CAPTAIN MERIWETHER LEWIS TO PRESIDENT THOMAS JEFFERSON  
APRIL 7, 1805<sup>1</sup>

*Captain Clark & his men building a line of huts. [Mathew Carey edition of Patrick Gass journal, 1810]*

*The height of the frame suggests that this was probably Ft. Mandan. In the spring of 1805 the Return Party floated the keelboat downriver from Ft. Mandan to St. Louis with documents; plant animal and mineral specimens; and the Indian artifacts the Corps had collected to that point.*



Lewis and Clark originally intended to send one of the pirogues back to St. Louis once the Expedition had reached a place suitable for winter quarters.<sup>2</sup> The men assigned to this responsibility are known as "the return party" to distinguish them from the "permanent party" who would complete the entire Expedition. On the 28th of August the red pirogue manned by the French engages was damaged when it struck a snag. "After examining her and finding that she was unfit for service," Clark

wrote in his journal, "deturmined to Send her back by the party." A pirogue lightly loaded and manned by a small crew could return to St. Louis before winter with reports of the Expedition.<sup>3</sup>

Thomas Jefferson and the rest of the nation were naturally very eager for news of the Corps of Discovery. A few rumors of the Corps' progress had reached the East. In early November, about the time the Corps began the construction of Fort Mandan, word



reached Jefferson that the Corps' had reached the mouth of the Platte River in early August. In a letter to Meriwether Lewis's younger brother Reuben, Jefferson stated that an unnamed informant had reported that "One of [the] boats & half the men would return from his [Lewis's] winter quarters."<sup>4</sup> On January 3 Jefferson received a report that the Corps intended to winter at the Knife River villages.<sup>5</sup>

The red pirogue was repaired and made "fit for service." But the sandbars that appeared with increasing frequency as the Expedition drew near the Mandan villages made the continued progress of the keelboat upstream doubtful. Instead of sending one of the pirogues downriver at this time, Lewis and Clark decided to send the keelboat the following spring. This had several advantages. During the winter at Fort Mandan Lewis and Clark would have the opportunity to learn more about the Indian nations who were their hosts and neighbors and about the Canadian traders operating in the area. What the men of the Corps experienced and learned was of great interest to Jefferson and other government officials, especially now that the United States had purchased the territory from France. The delayed departure would give the officers the chance to gain more intelligence and to write detailed reports to the appropriate officials.<sup>6</sup>

And there was much more to do that winter. The men would not be idle. Plant and animal specimens were described, labeled, and prepared for shipping, as were soil and mineral sam-

ples and Indian artifacts. Clark prepared maps and charts of the Missouri River. Journals were boxed and sealed. This was particularly important if the Corps should suffer some misfortune during the rest of the Expedition. At least the records kept during the first year would have been sent back down the Missouri.

Three privates from Captain Amos Stoddard's artillery company at Ft. Kaskaskia were assigned to the return party. They were Isaac White, Ebenezer Tuttle, and John Dame. All three were New England Yankees.<sup>7</sup>

**Private Isaac White** was born in Holiston, Massachusetts, and was living in Boston when he enlisted on February 13, 1801. He was twenty-six when joined the army. Stoddard's company book describes him as having a fair complexion, sandy hair and blue eyes. He stood 5'7 1/2" tall and his occupation is listed as "laborer."<sup>8</sup>

**Private Ebenezer Tuttle** was a twenty-nine year old farmer from New Haven, Connecticut, who joined the army in 1803 on January 1, 1803, at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. His eyes were blue, complexion fair, and hair brown. He was 5'7" tall.<sup>9</sup>

**Private John Dame** was a native of Newington, New Hampshire. He was a youth of seventeen when he enlisted at Portsmouth on August 20, 1801. That would make him about twenty years old when the Expedition left St. Louis in 1804, one of the Corps's youngest members. Dame was 5'9" with fair hair and complexion and blue eyes.<sup>10</sup>

The only narrative entry in the journals concerning Dame was on August 8, 1804. On that morning Dame shot a young pelican [the American white pelican, *pelecanus erthorhynchus*]. It was noteworthy because, Lewis wrote, the Corps "had seen but a few aquatic fowls of any kind on the river since we commenced our journey up the Missouri." There had been forewarning that something was afloat. Lewis was surprised earlier that day to see an island of white feathers some sixty or seventy yards across come drifting down the river.

A little further upstream the feather source was revealed: a huge colony of pelicans—covering several acres, Lewis thought—on an island. Lewis shot an adult bird for a specimen when the huge flock took flight at the approach of the boats. His description of the bird is a fine example of the training in ornithology he received before the Expedition and of his own skills as a naturalist and writer. The passage covers two pages in the Moulton edition of the journals. Would that he would have given as much thought and time to writing about White, Tuttle, and Dame!<sup>11</sup>

**Private John Boley** of the return party was "probably" born in Pittsburgh. His birth date is unknown, but most of Expedition members were in their twenties or early thirties. His family moved to St. Louis in 1794, but Boley was apparently living across the Mississippi River in Kaskaskia, Illinois, when he joined the army. At the time of his acceptance into the Corps in November 1803, he was a member of



Captain Russell Bissell's company of the 1st Infantry Regiment.<sup>12</sup>

Unfortunately, we know very little about his service on the Expedition because there are few references to him in the journals. He was one of several soldiers who got into trouble during the 1803–4 winter at Camp Wood, Illinois. A comment in Lewis's detachment orders of March 3, 1804, suggests that Boley may have had a taste for whiskey so great that he was willing to resort to subterfuge to satisfy it.<sup>13</sup> One of the most popular modes of skylarking at Camp Wood was to obtain permission from a sergeant to go hunting. The meat was always welcome in camp and improving one's marksmanship was good training for the expedition. But it was astonishing how often a deer's tracks led to the front door of some nearby tavern. Lewis restricted Boley and three other guilty privates to camp for ten days. To be thus chastised was not necessarily a permanent mark of disgrace; one of Boley's co-conspirators was John Colter.

Boley returned to St. Louis on the keelboat in 1805, but the exploring life apparently suited him. Upon his return he signed on with Zebulon Pike's expedition to search for the source of the Mississippi River. John Boley was also traveled with Pike to the southern Rockies in 1806–7 and is thought to have made at least one more foray into the Rockies after his discharge from the army. John Boley was surely one of America's most experienced and knowledgeable explorers. And yet we don't even know when he died, only that as late as October 1823, he was married

and living at Carondelet, Missouri.<sup>14</sup>

**Corporal Richard Warfington** commanded the return party. Warfington was born in Louisburg, North Carolina in 1777. He enlisted in the Army in 1799. Warfington was five feet ten inches tall, with a fair complexion, black eyes, and brown hair. When he was transferred to the Corps of Discovery in November 1804, he was a member of Captain John Campbell's company of the 2nd Infantry Regiment stationed at South West Point, Tennessee.<sup>15</sup> Both Clark and Lewis thought highly of Warfington. Referring to the written reports he entrusted to Warfington, Lewis wrote in 1807:

*...it was of some importance that the government should receive in safety the dispatches I was about to transmit...there was not one of the party destined to be returned from [Ft. Mandan] in whom I could place the least confidence except himself...<sup>16</sup>*

In a letter to his brother Jonathan written at Ft. Mandan, Clark stated that Warfington "has acquitted himself well."<sup>17</sup> Following the Expedition, Warfington was one of members of the Corps Lewis recommended for a salary bonus, stating that

*The duties assigned [Warfington] on this occasion were performed with a punctuality which uniformly characterized his conduct while under my command. Taking into view the cheerfulness with which he continued in the service after every obligation had ceased to*

*exist, from the exposures, the fatigues, labours and dangers incident to that service, and above all the fidelity with which he discharged this duty, it would seem that when rewards are about to be distributed among those of the party who were engaged in this enterprise that his claim to something more than his pay of seven dollars pr. month as corporal cannot be considered unreasonable.<sup>18</sup>*

Congress denied Lewis's request for more money, but it did vote Warfington the same 320 acre land warrant granted the men who were with the Corps for the entire duration of the Expedition. After that, he disappeared from American history.<sup>19</sup>

The return party spun the bow of the keelboat downstream in early April 1805. In addition to the return party, passengers included a lame Arikara hitching a ride down to his village and several of the Corps' former French engages, including [probably] Jean Deschamps, Jean La Jeunesse, Etienne Malboeuf, Peter or Charles Pineau, and Francois Rivet. At least a couple of the engages are thought to have accompanied the keelboat in their own dugout. At the Arikara villages the lame Indian swapped places with an Arikara chief and his French-Canadian interpreter. The last two members of the return party were also soldiers, John Newman and Moses Reed. Both had been discharged from the Corps in disgrace.<sup>20</sup> Beyond that fact, it does Newman an injustice to associate his name with Reed's.







## 6

Discipline—  
Robinson, Hall,  
Newman, and Reed

*I cannot in justice to myself omit saying, that the manly, and soldier-like behavior; and enterprising abilities; of both Captain Lewis and Captain Clark, claim my utmost gratitude; and the humanity shown at all times by them, to those under their command, on this perilous and important Voyage of discovery; I hope will ever fill the breasts of men who were under their command.*

—PRIVATE JOSEPH WHITEHOUSE<sup>1</sup>



*A bullboat. Private Hugh Hall's last "punishment" on the Expedition was a descent of the Yellowstone River in such a craft.*

Students of the Expedition universally pay tribute to the leadership of William Clark and Meriwether Lewis. Although the men under their command were self-motivated "pick'd men," they were still soldiers who would be expected to comply with orders without question. To do otherwise was to court disaster, whether it appeared in the form of an Indian fight or starving times in hostile

mountains. The complete isolation of the Corps from any authority beyond its two officers was a complicating factor. Examples must be made, precedents established. The success of the expedition, particularly during that first year on the Missouri River, depended upon the ability of Lewis and Clark to push the men constantly to the breaking point but never beyond. Discipline that



was either too harsh or too lenient could have led to disaster. Balance was critical.

A major goal of discipline was to prepare the men as individuals and as a unit for both the obvious and the potential physical, mental, and emotional challenges of the Expedition. Lewis and Clark met this objective because they consistently applied the right combination of firmness and leniency as the situation demanded. That doesn't mean that the officers were free to improvise. They were constrained in their actions and judgments by the Rules and Articles of War, a manual for military justice that had been in effect since 1776. Nor does it imply that things went smoothly from the beginning. During the first year of the Expedition, the Articles got quite a workout.<sup>2</sup>

Because Lewis spent most of the winter of 1803–4 making final preparations for the Expedition, discipline at Camp Wood was primarily Clark's responsibility. The site for the camp was chosen partially for disciplinary reasons: there were far fewer temptations in the Illinois woods than there would have been in the town of St. Louis. The most frequent infractions at Camp Wood were those common to soldiers: fighting, drinking, and insubordination. The "nine young men from Kentucky," who were getting a first taste of Army regimentation, tended to probe the boundaries of acceptable behavior more than the others. One man, Willard Leakins [origin unknown] went beyond. He was discharged for theft on February 2,

1804.<sup>3</sup> [And probably for his own good: a man who steals from his comrades or from the common stores could expect no mercy.]

Another man, **Corporal John Robinson**, seems to have fallen quickly into disfavor. He was born about 1779 in New Hampshire and was a shoemaker by trade. When he joined the Corps, he was a member of Captain Amos Stoddard's artillery company at Kaskaskia, Illinois. He was 5'9" tall and had light hair and complexion and blue eyes.<sup>4</sup> He is first mentioned in the Journals in Clark's entry for December 26, 1803: "...Willard and Corpl. Roberson Came home to day at about 11 oClock...." He was soon demoted to private, perhaps because of an incident Clark described on January 4, 1804: "Worner & Potts fight after Dark without my Knowledge & the Corpl. head of the mess left the hut & Suffered them to bruse themselves much, he has no authority..."<sup>5</sup>

Lewis and Clark had no use for a corporal who would not prevent his men from fighting, let alone one who would walk out and let them go at it. On March 3, 1804, Robinson was one of the men restricted to camp for lying to cover a visit to a "neighbouring whiskey shop."<sup>6</sup> His name appears for the last time in Clark's "Detachment Order" of April 1 as a member of Sgt. John Ordway's 3rd squad.<sup>7</sup> His departure from the Corps is only suggested in one source, Pvt. Joseph Whitehouse's entry for June 12, several weeks after the Corps' departure from Camp Wood. The Expedition met several boats coming

down the river belonging to St. Louis fur traders. Wrote Whitehouse, "We put on board...one Man that we had with us, belonging to Captain Stoddard's company of Artillery, who is going to Saint Louis..."<sup>8</sup> The other known Corps members from Stoddard's company continued with the Expedition, so it's likely that Lewis and Clark took advantage of this opportunity to discharge an unsatisfactory soldier.

The Lewis and Clark Expedition finally got underway up the great Missouri River at four in the afternoon on May 14, 1804. The wind was favorable and they "proceeded...under sail...under a jentle breeze" to the upper point of the first island in the river to make camp, according to William Clark.<sup>9</sup> Captain Meriwether Lewis was still in St. Louis tending to last minute business and would join the Corps at the village of St. Charles.

The Corps reached St. Charles on May 16th. Clark wrote that the village "contains about 100 indifferant houses, and abot 450 Inhabetents principally frinch, those people appear pore and extreemly kind...."<sup>10</sup> Thunderstorms had soaked the men every afternoon, so Clark didn't mind the delay. But he was concerned about what men who had been isolated from society for months might do. Lest the simple pleasures available in St. Charles should prove too tempting, Clark issued the following order:

*Note[:] the Commanding officer is full assured that every man of his detachment will have a true*



---

*respect for their own Dignity and not make it necessary for him to leave St. Charles for a more retired situation.*<sup>11</sup>

The majority of Clark's men proved worthy of his confidence in them. But there was a dance that night in St. Charles. Temptation proved too great for three privates. John Collins, William Werner, and Hugh Hall were accused of "misconduct" and ordered to stand trial the next morning. Sgt. John Ordway, who presided, convened the court-martial at 11am on the quarterdeck of the keelboat.<sup>12</sup> The Expedition probably never came closer to staging a scene from C. S. Forester or Patrick O'Brian.

Collins faced three charges: being absent without leave, "behaveing in an unbecoming manner at the ball last night," and speaking disrespectfully to Clark upon his return. He was found guilty and sentenced to receive fifty lashes. Werner and Hall wisely owned up to their misconduct and pled guilty. They were sentenced to twenty-five lashes. But the members of court argued that the "former good conduct" of Werner and Hall should be taken into consideration. Accordingly, Clark ruled that

*the punishment to be inflicted on William W[e]rner and Hugh Hall, is remitted under the assurance arriving from a confidence which the commanding officer has of the sincerity of the recommendation of the court.*<sup>13</sup>

Clark's decision to suspend the sentence affirmed three important principles:

1. If you're guilty, admit it and take your punishment.
2. Past good behavior (your "record") will be taken into account.
3. When appropriate, the officers may defer to the judgment of the men.

**Private Hugh Hall** was one of the soldiers transferred to the Corps of Discovery from Captain John Campbell's company of the 2nd U.S. Infantry at South West Point, Tennessee. He was born in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, in 1772 and entered the army in 1798. From his army records we learn that he 5'8 3/4" tall with blond hair and gray eyes.<sup>14</sup> He had the thirst for liquor common to the frontier army and found a compatriot in Private John Collins. William Clark's journal entry for December 31, 1803, includes the remark, "Hall & Collins drunk."<sup>15</sup> That's hardly unusual on New Year's Eve, but it may have been excessive to have drawn Clark's particular notice. Six months later on the Missouri River, Hall unwisely accepted Collins's invitation to a tot of whiskey. It cost him fifty lashes on his bare back. The whiskey came from the Corps liquor supply, which was issued to the men on regular, equitable basis. The Army ration included a gill, four ounces, of spirits per man each day. The problem was that Collins was on guard duty, and the drink he shared with Hall came from the Corps' supply.

Granted, there is a certain amount of "Willie and Joe" humor in a couple of soldiers helping themselves to whiskey one of them is supposed to be guard-

ing. But their comrades in arms were not amused. It was their whiskey Collins and Hall were stealing. For the record, Sgt. Charles Floyd accused Collins of "being drunk on his post this morning out of whiskey put under his charge as Sentinal." Collins, who had felt the lash only six weeks earlier in St. Charles, was given a sobering one hundred lashes. Hall, for extra-curricular imbibing, got fifty.<sup>16</sup>

Because the journals don't describe the floggings Hall and others were sentenced to, we must look to other sources. Army surgeon James Thacher described this gruesome form of corporal punishment in 1780:

*The culprit being securely tied to a tree, or post, receives on his naked back the number of lashes assigned him, by a whip formed of several small knotted cords ["cat-o-nine-tails"], which sometimes cut through the skin at every stroke. However strange it may appear, a soldier will often receive the severest stripes without uttering a groan, or once shrinking from the lash, even while the blood flows freely from his lacerated wound.*<sup>17</sup>

[Some officers would order that the prescribed number of lashes be administered in segments over a period of several days. After the first day the knotted cords would slash through raw and inflamed wounds.]

Both Hall and Collins were repeat offenders. The men themselves were



directly affected by the offense and were not inclined to clemency. Hall and Collins would bear the marks for the rest of their lives.

Of accidental injuries the journals have but one notice concerning Hall. On March 6, 1806, at Fort Clatsop, Lewis wrote, "Hall had his foot and ankle much injured yesterday by the fall of a large stick of timber; the bones were fortunately not broken and I expect he will be able to walk again shortly." No further mention is made of his injury, so we may assume it healed satisfactorily.<sup>18</sup>

On the return journey in 1806 Hall was a member of Clark's Yellowstone River exploration detachment. When in late July Clark determined to return to river transport, he had the men make two dugout canoes. Clark ordered Sgt. Nathaniel Pryor and a small detachment to herd the detachment's horses overland to the Mandan villages and wait there for the boat party. Hall, a poor swimmer who was less than enthusiastic about returning to the water, got permission from Clark to join Pryor. But one night shortly after Pryor and his men separated from Clark, all the horses were stolen, probably by Crow warriors. Fortunately, they remembered enough about the hide and willow bullboats they'd seen Indians use to construct a couple for themselves. Poor Hugh Hall! Instead of descending the Yellowstone in a canoe, he went spinning downriver in a big inverted umbrella, minus the handle. Following the Expedition Private Hugh Hall left but two tracks for the histori-

an, a reported presence in St. Louis in 1809 and his name on Clark's list of former members of the Expedition written in the 1820s, with no indication of Hall's fate or whereabouts.<sup>19</sup>

August 3, 1804, may not have been the most important day of the Expedition to that point, but it may have been the most impressive visually. Lewis and Clark hosted their first counsel with Indians: chiefs of the Oto and Missouri tribes. The members of the Corps paraded in formal dress uniform, packages of gifts were distributed, and speeches delivered and translated. When the ceremonies were concluded in mid-afternoon, the boats were loaded and the Corps went another five miles up the Missouri before stopping for the night.<sup>20</sup>

The next morning **Private Moses Reed** got permission to return to the previous campsite to look for a missing knife. The river offered more than its normal quota of difficulties that day and the Corps only made a little over ten miles. Reed didn't have that far to walk, but he failed to return that evening. He had naturally taken his rifle. A search of his knapsack revealed that Reed's clothes and ammunition were suspiciously missing. Clark wrote in his journal on the 5th that "we have some reasons to believe he has Deserted."<sup>21</sup> On the 7th, George Drouillard, the expedition's best hunter and tracker, and three privates were sent to find Reed. Their orders were to convince Reed to return "Peaceibly" or shoot him.<sup>22</sup>

It took Drouillard and his detachment almost two weeks to find and escort

Moses Reed back to face punishment. At his court-martial, Reed pled guilty to desertion and the theft of a rifle and ammunition. He asked for clemency, and was sentenced to "run the gauntlet" through the Corps four times.<sup>23</sup> Army Surgeon James Thacher described this method of corporal punishment:

*...this is done by a company of soldiers standing in two lines, each one furnished with a switch, and the criminal is madder to run between them and receive the scourge from their hands on his naked back; but the delinquent runs so rapidly, and the soldiers are so apt to favor a comrade, that it often happens in this way that the punishment is very trivial; but on some occasions, a soldier is ordered to hold a bayonet at his breast to impede his steps...*<sup>24</sup>

Each man struck Reed with a bundle of nine switches as he went by. The Oto Indians who witnessed Reed's scourging were appalled; such harsh discipline was unknown to them. They asked that Reed be spared. The officers explained to them that it was the custom of their army and that they were concerned about the "injury" through "false representation" that a deserter like Reed could do to the friendly relations Lewis and Clark hoped to establish with the Indian nations. The members of the Corps of Discovery required no explanation about desertion and its penalties. Had they been engaged in hostilities, Reed's surrender and confession might not have saved him. Desertion in the face of the enemy may end with a



hanging or a firing squad, not a lashed back. The tension of Reed's trial and punishment was tempered by the distribution of an extra ration of spirits in the evening.<sup>25</sup>

There was an early indication that Reed may have been a misfit. Reed and Private Joseph Whitehouse were whip-sawing lumber in the first week of January 1804 at Camp Wood. Clark remarked in his journal on January 6th that the two were getting along better than they had the week before, "or in other Words Re[ed] Saws better from practice."<sup>26</sup> One can perhaps read into this comment an officer's wry evaluation of an early 18th century Sad Sack or Beetle Bailey. Moses Reed was officially expelled from the permanent party of the Corps on October 8, 1804, but he stayed on through the winter at Ft. Mandan and descended the Missouri with the return party in the spring of 1805.

**Private John Newman** of Pennsylvania joined the Corps of Discovery at Ft. Massac in November 1803. He was at that time a soldier in Captain Daniel Bissell's company of the U.S. 1st Infantry.<sup>27</sup> He signed on as a member of the permanent party and was seldom mentioned in the journals. But in October 1804 he faced a court-martial for "having uttered repeated expressions of a highly criminal and mutinous nature."<sup>28</sup> There is no information as to what "expressions" Newman voiced, but to judge by comparing the sentence Newman received with those that had been delivered earlier, they must have been very bad indeed. Lewis described

the incident in some detail in a letter written to Secretary of War Henry Dearborn several months after the return of the Expedition to St. Louis:

*"...he committed himself by using certain mutinous expressions which caused me to arrest him and to have him tryed by a Court Martial formed of his peers; they finding him guilty sentenced him to receive seventy-five lashes and to be discharged from the permanent party, this sentence was enforced by me, and the punishment took place."*<sup>29</sup>

An Arikara chief traveling with the Corps was so severely shocked at seeing Newman flogged that he "cried aloud" when it began. He protested to Clark that "his nation never whiped even their Children."<sup>30</sup> There is some speculation that Newman had come under the harmful influence of Moses Reed; both were placed under confinement on October 12th. But there any comparison must stop. While Reed remained in disgrace, John Newman made himself one of the most valuable members of the Corps.

Again, from Lewis's letter to Dearborn:

*In the course of the winter while at Fort Mandan, from an ardent wish to attone for his crime which he had committed at an unguarded moment, he exerted himself on every occasion to become usefull. This disposition induced him to expose himself too much to the intense cold of that climate...he*

*had his hands and feet severely frozen with which he suffered extreme pain for some weeks.*<sup>31</sup>

When the ice broke up in the Missouri and the time to leave had come, Newman asked to be forgiven and re-admitted to the permanent party. Despite his conviction that Newman was sincerely repentant, Lewis "deemed it impolitic to relax from the sentence, altho he stood acquitted in my mind." A verdict justly rendered would not be reversed. With reluctance Lewis sent Newman back as a member of the return party. To his eternal credit Newman refused to turn deep disappointment into resentment. Lewis learned after the Expedition that during the return party's journey, the keelboat "on several occasions owed her safety in great measure to [Newman's] personal exertions, being a man of uncommon activity and personal strength." Unlike Moses Reed, John Newman regained a place of honor in the Corps of Discovery and in American history.<sup>32</sup>







## 7

# The French of the Permanent Party: LePage, Labiche, and Cruzatte

At "Canoe Camp" on Idaho's Clearwater River, the Corps adopted the Nez Perce method of using fire to hollow out pine logs to make canoes. Lead boatman Pierre Cruzatte advised Lewis and Clark on how to make safe passages with these craft through the awesome rapids of the Columbia River.



The dismissal of Moses Reed and John Newman from the Corps of Discovery created two openings on the permanent party. Private Robert Frazer, previously a member of the return party, was transferred to fill Reed's position.<sup>1</sup> **Jean Baptiste LePage**, who took Newman's place, was a French-Canadian trader living at the Knife River villages when the Corps of Discovery arrived in late October 1804. On November 2 he became Private LePage and the newest member of the Corps of Discovery.<sup>2</sup>

Lewis and Clark may have recruited LePage because he already had impressive experience in wilderness exploration. In 1803 he visited the Cheyenne tribe in the Black Hills and descended the Little Missouri River in a dugout

canoe. His description of the river and the country through which it flowed, including hills of volcanic rock, were particularly useful to Clark, the Expedition's chief cartographer. On April 14th, two days after the Corps had passed the mouth of the Little Missouri, they came to a small creek entering from the south side. Both LePage and Toussaint Charbonneau had ascended the Missouri this far. But neither they nor any other Euro-Americans had been beyond this point.<sup>3</sup>

LePage does not figure prominently in the journals during the remainder of the Expedition. He was one of the men Lewis referred to in the letter to Secretary of War Henry Dearborn as "Entitled to no peculiar merit." An incident on the Lolo Trail perhaps soured



Lewis's opinion of LePage. The circumstances could hardly have been worse. On September 20, 1805, Lewis was leading the starving members of the Corps westward along the treacherous Lolo Trail. Three days earlier Clark had gone ahead with a small hunting party. It was a cold, damp morning. They couldn't start until 10am because their worn-out, sore-footed horses had strayed during the night in search of feed. The trail was wet, steep, and covered with downfall in a country where that could mean a cedar log four feet in diameter and visibility is sometimes no more than a few yards. After coming about two miles they were delighted to find the carcass of a horse that Clark had killed on the 18th. At 1pm they halted for a boiled horse dinner.

As they prepared to leave, the horse LePage had been leading was missing. Neither the horse nor its baggage was superfluous. It carried Indian trade goods and Lewis's winter clothing. LePage searched for two hours but couldn't find his horse. Lewis then sent "two of my best woodsmen" in search of the horse and proceeded on. There's no mention of their return with the horse, but Lewis would more likely have mentioned their failure in his journal than their success. We may assume they found it.<sup>4</sup>

During the winter at Ft. Clatsop, LePage is mentioned several times as a hunting partner with George Drouillard. His only recorded illness during the Expedition was a bad cold he contracted at Ft. Clatsop. Lewis dosed him with "Scott's Pills."<sup>5</sup> After the Expedition the only

known record of Jean Baptiste LePage is Clark's notation that he had died sometime prior to the late 1820s.<sup>6</sup>

**Private Francois LaBiche** had a critical role in the language translation sequence employed by the Corps, a complicated process that has long been a favorite Lewis and Clark story. It reached a climax of complexity in early September 1805, when the miserably cold, wet and hungry Corps of Discovery came upon a village of the Salish people near present day Sula, Montana. Like the Shoshone band the Corps had just left behind them in the Lemhi valley, the Salish were short on meat and were preparing to cross the continental divide to the Missouri River buffalo hunting grounds. But, to the Corps' relief, they were willing to sell the explorers a few horses before they left. Discussions with the Salish required the use of five languages. Clark or Lewis would make a statement or ask a question in English to Private Francois LaBiche. He translated it to French for Toussaint Charbonneau. He repeated it to his wife Janey in Hidatsa, the only language they had in common. She phrased it in her native Shoshone to an un-named Shoshone person living with the Salish tribe who spoke their language.<sup>7</sup>

Although it seems likely that Lewis and Clark first encountered Francois LaBiche and Pierre Cruzatte at Ft. Kaskaskia on the Mississippi River in the fall of 1803,<sup>8</sup> they were not formally enlisted as privates until just prior to the Corps' departure in the spring of 1804.<sup>9</sup> LaBiche brought talents similar to those of Pierre (Peter) Cruzatte to

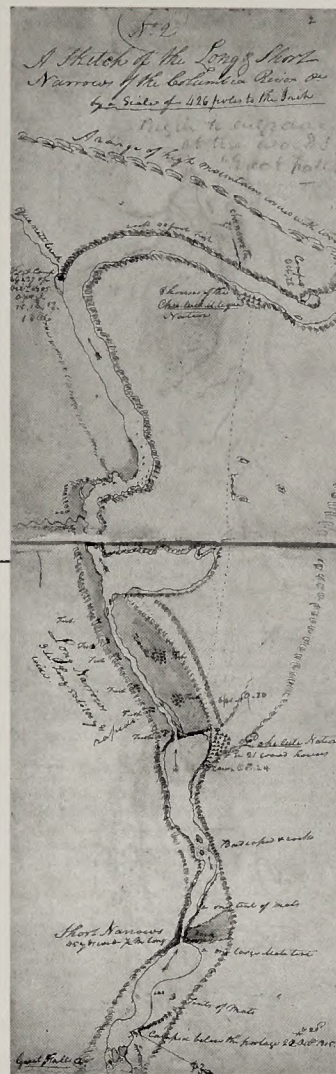
the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Both were conversant in French and English and familiar with several Indian languages through their experience as traders among the tribes of the lower Missouri River. They were also both skilled boatmen. On the Expedition they alternated with each other as the "bows-man" on one of the pirogues.<sup>10</sup>

Labiche was already known and respected among the Otos, the first tribe encountered by the Corps in the summer of 1804. Here Lewis and Clark had their first opportunity to advance President Thomas Jefferson's idealistic goal of bringing about a general peace among the tribes of the newly-acquired Louisiana Territory. An Oto chief asked the captains to send LaBiche as a peace emissary to their enemies, the Pawnees.<sup>11</sup> But the Corps was headed upriver and could not spare a man as valuable as LaBiche. LaBiche also translated for Lewis and Clark during the Corps' tense confrontation with the Teton Sioux farther up the Missouri in September.

In addition to translating and leading a boat crew, LaBiche proved to be an excellent hunter, particularly of waterfowl. Near Fort Clatsop he also shot a condor. Clark measured its wingspan at nine feet and noted in his journal, "I believe this to be the largest bird of North America."<sup>12</sup> On the return trip in 1806 LaBiche was a member of Clark's detachment. From St. Louis he traveled overland to Washington D.C. as part of the entourage that included Clark, Lewis, York, Sgt. John Ordway, several Osage chiefs, the Mandan chief Sheheke



Clark's map of The Dalles of the Columbia River, where "the water was agitated in a most Shocking manner boils Swells & whorl pools. . ."



and his wife and son, and fur trader Pierre Choteau.<sup>13</sup> Although nothing is known for certain about his origins, Francois LaBiche apparently returned to the St. Louis area. Clark's list of the fate and whereabouts of Expedition members written in the late 1820s has Labiche living there.<sup>14</sup>

On June 2, 1805, the Corps of Discovery made camp opposite a river that wasn't supposed to be there. But there it was. Lewis and Clark had been fortunate during the 1804-5 winter in Ft. Mandan in getting good information about the Missouri River from the Hidatsas, who traveled often across Montana to raid the Lemhi Shoshone on the upper Missouri. Now, in early June, the Corps was almost two months up the Missouri and beyond what was supposed to have been the last major tributary entering the Missouri from the north. It was too late on the evening of the 2nd to investigate the unexpected river, so on the morning of the 3rd they crossed the Missouri and made camp on the point of land between the two rivers. Further examination produced only

more confusion. The northern branch was not as wide as the southern, but its water was the same roily muddy brown that had characterized the Missouri to this point. The southern or left branch ran clear and slick over a cobbled bottom.<sup>15</sup>

Small scouting parties were sent up each river and up into the hills and plateau above the rivers. Their reports that evening back in camp failed to solve the riddle as far as the captains were concerned, but most of the men were inclined to favor the right or northern fork. None of the parties had gone far enough to locate the one clue that could resolve the question. The Hidatsas had told Lewis and Clark that before they penetrated the Rocky Mountains they would come to a "great falls" on the Missouri.<sup>16</sup>

On the 4th of June Clark and Lewis both led parties out for another look, Clark up the southern fork, Lewis the northern. Although Clark did not go far enough to reach the falls, he returned firmer in his conviction that the southern branch was the true Missouri. Lewis returned two days later with the same conclusion. **Private Pierre Cruzatte**, however, disagreed, and his opinion carried considerable weight with his colleagues. As Lewis recorded it in his journal, "Cruzatte, who...who from his integrity, knowledge and skill as a waterman had acquired the confidence of the...party [,] declared it as his opinion that the [northern branch] was the true genuine Missouri." Only two members of the Corps disagreed: Lewis and Clark.<sup>17</sup>

Few incidents better illustrate the confidence and trust Lewis and Clark had earned than the cheerful willingness of their men to accept their officers' decision and go up the southern branch despite their opinion that it was the wrong river. Lewis named the new river Maria's River for his cousin Maria Wood, though for some reason the apostrophe has been dropped and the "i" is pronounced as in "eye." It was an impressive stream and an intriguing one because its headwaters, wherever they might be, were newly acquired American territory as part of the Louisiana Purchase. Lewis and Clark were right, of course, as Lewis would prove when he discovered the Great Falls on June 13th.<sup>18</sup>

Cruzatte may have been wrong this time, but his unique, and enviable, place in American history is not to be denied: lead boatman for the Lewis and Clark Expedition. It was his job to read the river and determine the best route. Sometimes they just dug their paddles deep and went for it. But some rapids deserved more respect. Imagine yourself with William Clark and "principal waterman Pierre Cruzatte on October 24, 1805, as they surveyed the Dalles of the Columbia River. From its average width of a thousand yards, the Columbia at the Dalles, wrote Clark:

*is compressed into a Chanel between two rocks not exceeding forty-five yards wide and continues for ¼ of a mile when it again widens to 200 yards and continues this width for about 2 miles when it is again intersepted by rocks...*<sup>19</sup>



Undaunted by the frothy white maelstrom, Cruzatte and Clark agreed: "by good Stearing we could pass down Safe." The local natives who had gathered to see the Corps were appalled. These strange white men were crazy; pity the poor Indian woman with them. There was a happy match between the Corps' no-swimmers like Hugh Hall and cargo like journals, guns, and ammunition that were too valuable to risk. A portage was carried out. Two boats, the first probably commanded by Cruzatte, headed toward what Clark described as "this agitated gut Swelling, boiling & whirling in every direction...." The "boats" were nothing but hollowed out pine trunks that resembled the driftwood littering the shore more than they did any proper watercraft. One dugout filled with water; the rest came through all right.<sup>20</sup>

Cruzatte was popular with his mates, who nicknamed him "St. Peter." His father was French and his mother an Omaha; he had much more in common with the Corps' engages than he did the soldiers. His fiddle playing enlivened many evenings during the Expedition and provided the music accompaniment to the men's spirited dancing, a performance which delighted Indian audiences. Although he wasn't formally enlisted for the Expedition until May 16, 1804, at St. Charles, Lewis and Clark apparently first met Cruzatte at Ft. Kaskaskia in the autumn of 1803. He knew the Missouri River, having spent several years as a trader among the tribes, and knew Indian sign language.<sup>21</sup>

His knowledge of his mother's language

served the Expedition well during its stopover with the Teton Sioux in late September 1804. Lewis and Clark were wary of the Tetons, a large, aggressive tribe who fancied themselves masters of the Missouri. A Teton war party had recently raided the Omahas, killing over seventy people and capturing dozens more. The officers had Cruzatte distribute awls, needles, and other small items among the unfortunate captives. Some of them told Cruzatte that the Sioux intended to prevent the Corps from continuing upriver. Cruzatte warned the captains, who were able to avert bloodshed.<sup>22</sup>

It is Pierre Cruzatte's misfortune to be best remembered for an accident that occurred during the homeward journey. On August 11th, 1806, Lewis and the men in his canoe stopped to hunt elk in a "thick willow bar" on the shore of the Missouri. Cruzatte hunted occasionally, even though he was as good as blind in one eye. He managed to wound an elk, which ran into a dense stand of willows. Lewis spied the elk and had raised his gun to shoot when, as he wrote in his journal, "...a ball struck my left thye about an inch below my hip joint, missing the bone it passed through the left thye and cut the thickness of the bullet across the hinder part of the right thye."

Because he was wearing leather clothing, Lewis thought at first that poor-sighted Cruzatte had mistaken him for the elk and accidentally shot him. "Damn you!" Lewis shouted. "You have shot me!" Cruzatte suddenly faced a crisis of conscience. When you make a bad mistake (and shooting your com-

mander in the rear makes the short list), do you confess and hope for forgiveness, or do you keep your mouth shut and hope someone else gets blamed? Cruzatte remained silent. Lewis shouted, "Cruzatte! Cruzatte!"

Assuming from the silence that Cruzatte must be too far away to hear him, the thought occurred to Lewis that he had been shot by Indians. He limped off toward the boat as fast as he could, still calling Cruzatte's name, but as a warning now, not a curse. Still no answer! Perhaps St. Peter had been captured or murdered. When Lewis came within sight of the boat, he shouted at the men who were waiting there to come running with their guns. While the men began their search for Cruzatte and Indians, Lewis hobbled back to the boat and readied his rifle, pistol, and air gun "to sell my life as dearly as possible." Twenty minutes later the men returned with Cruzatte. They'd seen no sign of Indians. Cruzatte told Lewis that if he had indeed shot him, it had not been his intention to do so. Lewis dressed his wounds with Sgt. Patrick Gass's assistance. The ball had stuck neither bone nor artery, but it did bleed profusely and Lewis was not able to sit in comfort for many days.<sup>23</sup> We can't say for certain what direction Pierre Cruzatte's life pursued following the Expedition. Clark believed that he had been killed by 1825-8.<sup>24</sup>



## 8

# The Mountain Men: Collins, Weiser, Potts, and Colter

## A Canoe Striking a Tree.

[Mathew Carey edition of Patrick Gass journal, 1810]

Privates George Shannon, John Collins, and John Potts capsized their canoe when it struck trees along the bank after a crossing of the Clearwater River in high water on May 30, 1806.



Private John Colter was the one member of the Corps of Discovery whose post-Expedition exploits rival anything he accomplished during his time with the Corps. "A legend in his own time" is not a cliché when applied to Colter. He is considered to be the first of the mountain men, the fur trappers who explored the West during the two generations after Lewis and Clark. Colter caught the imagination and envy of millions who love wild country and regret not being the first to see it. Yes, Colter was first, but several less known members of the Corps also returned to the mountains.

**Private John Collins** started out as a troublemaker. In one of the many lists of the men Clark recorded in the journals at Camp Dubois in 1804, the term

"blackgard" appears after Collins' name.<sup>1</sup> Why? Perhaps for stunts like the one Collins pulled on January 25. Away from camp hunting, he came upon the carcass of a hog hung up in a tree near a farm. Collins carried half of it back to camp and tried, unsuccessfully, to pass it off as bear meat.<sup>2</sup> "Living off the land" was something the Corps would be required to do, but not that way, and not yet. Collins was one of the three men who got into trouble at St. Charles, Missouri, in May 1804 and in June was court-martialed and flogged for drinking whiskey that wasn't his. For the rest of his life, Collins literally carried on his back the reminder of his transgression.<sup>3</sup>

His origins are obscure. We don't know when he was born, but it was probably



in Frederick County, Maryland. He was apparently transferred to the Corps of Discovery from Captain Russell Bissell's company of the U.S. 1st Infantry Regiment.<sup>4</sup> A member of Sgt. Nathaniel Pryor's squad, he served as its cook.<sup>5</sup> And although he was not, like Pryor, one of the nine young men from Kentucky, he proved to be such a superb hunter and woodsman that Lewis and Clark were willing to overlook some of his demerits. It's no surprise that he was also an innovative brew master. From some wet, moldy camas bread acquired from the Nez Perce on the Clearwater River, Collins brewed up what Clark considered "some very good beer."<sup>6</sup>

During the Fort Clatsop winter of 1805-6 on the coast of Oregon, Collins spent some time hunting elk for the men at the seaside salt camp. Perhaps at no point in the Expedition was Collins' hunting skill more genuinely appreciated than in May 1806. The Corps were camped on the lower Clearwater River waiting for enough snow to melt on the Lolo Trail to permit their passage eastward. Because there were also several hundred Nez Perce people living nearby, game was scarce. Hunting parties were dispatched throughout the surrounding area. On May 14, Collins brought in the carcasses of two bears, perhaps inspiring some jokes at his expense among those who recalled his Camp Wood "bear meat." Lewis gave half of one carcass to some Nez Perce camped nearby, commenting in his journal that "this was a great treat to those poor wretches who scarcely taist meat once a month."<sup>7</sup>

Collins killed more bears in the Weippe Prairie area, including one that Lewis described in his journal as a "bey grizle." When Collins told Clark that the rain that fell down on the Clearwater River was several inches of wet snow on the prairie above, Clark noted that "here we have Summer, Spring, and Winter [in the mountains] in the Short Space of twenty or thirty miles." Anyone living in the area today can vouch for the accuracy of Clark's observation each year during May.<sup>8</sup>

Once the Expedition had re-crossed the Rockies headed east, Collins was assigned to the detachment led by Sgt. Ordway who were responsible for taking the canoes from the headwaters of the Jefferson River down to the Missouri and a rendezvous with Lewis's detachment at the Great Falls. In early August, Collins and John Colter returned to the river from a hunting foray to find that their mates were not where they thought they should be. Assuming the rest of the party was behind them, they settled down to wait for them. After a few days they realized their mistake and deadheaded down the Missouri in their canoe. They were "missing" about nine days.<sup>9</sup>

Following the Expedition, John Collins seems to have successfully evaded the historical record for seventeen years. In 1823 he was believed to have been a member of the large party taken up the Missouri by fur trader William Ashley. In late May, Ashley's two keelboats reached the fortified villages of the Arikaras, who occasionally caused traders considerable trouble. Ashley

purchased some horses from the Arikaras to outfit an overland party. To manage the horses, about forty men from the boats camped on a sandbar. One night an Ashley man who had gone to take advantage of Arikara hospitality was murdered and his body mutilated. It led to a battle.

When the sun rose, the Indians opened fire on the men and horses on the sandbar. Most of the horses and several men were quickly cut down. The survivors took cover behind dead or dying horses and tried to return fire. As the two boats weighed anchor and began to drift downstream, the Arikara warriors came out to press their attack against the shore party. Those who could leave swam out to the boats or swam with the current downstream to safety. Several men were killed in the river by Arikara bullets. Eleven of Ashley's men were wounded in the fight, thirteen killed. It was one of the worst defeats of an American party in the annals of the fur trade. Among the thirteen dead was John Collins, veteran of the Corps of Discovery.<sup>10</sup>

**Private Peter Weiser**, of German ancestry, was born on October 3, 1781 in Pennsylvania. He was a member of Captain Russell Bissell's company of the 1st U.S. Infantry at Ft. Kaskaskia, Illinois, when Lewis stopped at the fort on his way up the Mississippi River in December 1803.<sup>11</sup> He was also one of the soldiers who were disciplined before the Corps headed up the Missouri in 1804. On March 3 he was court-martialed and found guilty of asking permission to go hunting as a



pretext for an unauthorized visit to a nearby "whiskey shop." He was confined to camp for ten days.<sup>12</sup>

Weiser hunted, cooked, and served as quartermaster for his squad.<sup>13</sup> During the 1805–6 winter at Ft. Clatsop, he also spent some time at the salt camp on the coast. In the late spring of 1806 he participated in one of the more interesting detached missions of the Expedition. At that time the Corps were camped near present day Kamiah, Idaho, on the Clearwater River in north central Idaho. There were also several bands of Nez Perces living in the area. Food was scarce. The hunters roamed the country in pursuit of game. The men also bought roots from the Indians. One day when Private Silas Goodrich went to trade for some roots, he noticed a few fresh salmon in a lodge. This was a surprise because salmon hadn't begun to arrive in the Clearwater River yet. Goodrich, the Expedition angler, found out that the Nez Perce had caught them in the Salmon River or, as the Corps knew it, Lewis's River.

Privates Weiser and Frazer and Sgt. John Ordway were sent to procure salmon. Their route took them up Lawyer's Creek to the Camas Prairie and then down into the canyon of the Salmon River. Dr. Steve Russell, the foremost authority on the Lewis and Clark Trail in Idaho, affirmed Ordway's May 29th description of the descent into the canyon: "crossed a steep bad hill and descended down a long hill an[d] a run pass a large lodge and descended the worst hills we ever saw

a road made down." Ordway purchased as many Salmon as he thought was necessary to take home and set out for the camp back on the Clearwater. But Indian boys stole some of the fish the first night and by the time they got the rest back to camp, they were too spoiled to eat.<sup>14</sup>

Weiser had one recorded accident on the Expedition—a badly cut leg in July 1806—and an untimely case of constipation. When Lewis had finally gotten the Expedition started toward Lemhi Pass on August 24, a Shoshone rode up from the rear of the column to inform Lewis that one of his men had taken sick. Lewis went back, discovered it was Weiser, and dosed him with tincture of peppermint and laudanum. In thirty minutes Weiser was ready to go. Lewis let him ride the horse that a Shoshone had generously loaned him for the journey over the pass. But the Indians who were ahead of Lewis had in the meantime gotten tired of waiting for him to catch up. They unloaded their horses and turned them out to graze. Lewis's men followed suit. The day's travel, all six miles of it, was over.<sup>15</sup>

After the Expedition Weiser joined John Colter and John Potts as a member of Manuel Lisa's fur company. There's no firm evidence of his wanderings, but the Weiser River, a tributary to the Snake, was on the map of the West that Clark published in 1814. Clark's 1820s list of the Expedition members indicated that Weiser had been killed by that period, possibly by Blackfeet. The Weiser River and the town of Weiser, Idaho, are named for him.<sup>16</sup>

**Private John Potts** was born in 1776 in Dillenburg, a town in the German state of Hessen. At an unknown date he immigrated to Pennsylvania, a magnet for many Germans. By occupation a miller, he enlisted in the Army in 1800.<sup>17</sup> His army records say he had black hair and eyes and a fair complexion. He came to the Corps from Captain John Campbell's company of the 2nd U.S. Infantry Regiment at South West Point, Tennessee. One of the more obscure members of the Expedition, Potts is seldom mentioned in the journals. On May 30, 1806, he, Collins, and George Shannon had a close call on Idaho's Clearwater River. The three paddled one of the canoes across the river to barter for some camas root with the Nez Perce. The river was running high and fast. When they tried to land, the current swung the canoe into some trees along the shore. The boat capsized and sank. Potts, who was a poor swimmer, nearly drowned. They lost the trade goods they had brought for purchasing the camas: three blankets and a wool coat.<sup>18</sup>

Several weeks later Potts cut himself badly with a knife on the calf of one leg. It bled so severely that Lewis applied a tourniquet to stop the flow.<sup>19</sup> During the crossing of the Lolo Trail the wound became inflamed, causing Potts considerable pain. Lewis, perhaps recalling a remedy his mother, a noted "herbalist," had used, treated the wound successfully with a poultice of wild ginger.<sup>20</sup> Potts suffered as well from sunburn during the final stretch of the Expedition on the Missouri River. By that point the clothing of many of the



men hung in tatters. Clark later recalled that Potts of the "fair" complexion was as dark as an Indian, "having first lost his skin, which peeled off and then became hard and no longer swelled." Of course, mosquitoes feasted upon the exposed skin. The long hours on the river each day also caused the men considerable discomfort in their eyes.<sup>21</sup>

Following the Expedition Potts spent less than a year in "civilization" before heading back up the Missouri, a story we'll return to shortly.

*John Colter...asks leave of our officers to go back with Mr Dixon a trapping...so our officers Settled with him and fitted him out with powder lead and a great number of articles which compleated him for a trapping voyage which they are determined to Stay until the make a fortune, @C.@C...Colter Mr Dixon and Handcock parted with us in their small canoe.*

Sgt. John Ordway  
August 17th, 1806<sup>22</sup>

John Colter casts a long shadow across the West of the imagination. His adventures after the Expedition are legendary. His race for life from a band of Blackfoot warriors is perhaps the best known of all the tales of the Rocky Mountains. Colter satisfies those students of the Expedition who reach the middle Missouri and rebel in their minds against leaving the plains and mountains. And while the romantic in us wants to say that Colter turned back for the love of the country, Ordway's com-

ment brings us to reality. Colter and the other members of the Corps had seen streams and rivers thick with unmolested beaver, a "fortune" for the taking.

He was probably born near Staunton, Virginia, in the early 1770s and moved to Kentucky with his family as a boy. Family tradition states that Colter joined Lewis at Maysville, Kentucky, but he may have been one of the unnamed men who boarded the keelboat at Pittsburgh in 1803.<sup>23</sup> At Camp Wood Colter was one of the men whose conversion to army life was not without a little backsliding. Twice he was disciplined for the inappropriate consumption of whiskey. In March 1804 he threatened to shoot Sgt. John Ordway, who commanded the Corps when both Lewis and Clark were absent. With a sincere promise to do better he obtained forgiveness from the officers.<sup>24</sup>

Colter went on to become one of the Corps' most valuable and versatile members in much the same manner as the Field brothers. He excelled as a hunter and scout, in fact, at any duty that demanded the ability of a man to move alone through the wilderness. When George Shannon was lost on the Missouri River in 1804, Colter was sent after him.<sup>25</sup> In September 1804 he killed the Corps' first mule deer.<sup>26</sup> He helped to build dugout canoes at the Great Falls. He could think clearly in a sudden crisis. In September 1805 Colter was hunting on Lolo Creek in Montana when he came upon three mounted warriors. He set his rifle down and approached them in a friendly way. They responded in kind and accepted

Colter's invitation to return to camp for a visit.<sup>27</sup>

A year later the Corps met Joseph Dixon and Forrest Hancock coming up the Missouri. Dixon and Hancock had started up the river in 1804, hunting and trapping as they came. Neither Colter nor his two new partners left a written account of their decision to go into the fur business together. Dixon and Hancock stood to profit by Colter's knowledge of the country, Colter by sharing their trapping outfit. In the words of William Clark:

*Colter expressed a desire to join [Dickson and Hancock], who offered to become [partners] and furnish traps @C...his services could be dispensed with...and as we were disposed to be of service to anyone of our party who had performed their duty as well as Colter had done, we agreed to allow him the privilege provided no [other] one of our party would ask or expect a similar permission to which they all agreed.<sup>28</sup>*

Colter said farewell to his Expedition friends and with his new partners paddled west. He was going back to the mountains.

There's little reliable evidence of the events in the life of the Colter, Dixon, and Hancock partnership. They probably headed up the Yellowstone River, although Colter, as a member of Lewis's detachment, had not explored it. And Colter may have thought that a journey to the beaver-rich upper Missouri was



imprudent if the tribe with whom Lewis had had his fatal encounter was stirred up and looking for revenge. For reasons unknown the partnership was dissolved at some point during that winter or the following spring. Colter was next seen canoeing solo down the Missouri River near its confluence with the Platte River in the spring of 1807.<sup>29</sup>

There he met what was probably the first large scale fur trade expedition on the Missouri River after the return of the Corps of Discovery in September 1806. The expedition was lead by the Spanish St. Louis trader Manuel Lisa. He had two keelboats and over fifty men, including three Lewis and Clark veterans: Peter Weiser, John Potts, and George Drouillard. None of these three had been with Clark on his exploration of the Yellowstone River in 1806, so Colter's knowledge of the area was worth a mint to Lisa. And they would have gotten the details of Clark's route from the Three Forks of the Missouri over Bozeman Pass to the Yellowstone. The Lewis and Clark men with Lisa remembered the Jefferson River as the best beaver country they had seen. Traveling Clark's route in reverse would get them there. They would also bypass both the potentially dangerous Blackfoot country on the upper Missouri and the tough portage around the Great Falls.<sup>30</sup>

Lisa's party turned south up the Yellowstone and at its confluence with the Bighorn River constructed what would come to be known as Manuel's Fort.<sup>31</sup> Lisa sent Colter out to contact the Crow tribe and invite them to come

to the fort to trade. What Colter accomplished during the winter of 1807-8 was perhaps the most astonishing solo exploration in American history. It may have been a completely lost adventure if Colter had not told William Clark about it when he returned to St. Louis and Clark had not drawn what he understood to be Colter's route on the map he published in 1814.

Although there are many inaccuracies in scale and location, several key landmarks are identifiable, including Yellowstone Lake and Jackson Hole. Clark didn't indicate Colter's direction of travel on his stunning loop, but it's generally interpreted to have been clockwise. Setting out from the fort in October, Colter went west up the Yellowstone River, then south across the Pryor Mountains, the Shoshone River, and the eastern flank of the Absaroka Range, then west across the Wind River Mountains to Jackson Hole with a possible side trip to Idaho's Teton Basin. He continued north along the eastern foot of the Tetons, through Yellowstone Park, then east across the Snowy Range, north down the Clark Fork of the Yellowstone, and down the Yellowstone to the fort.

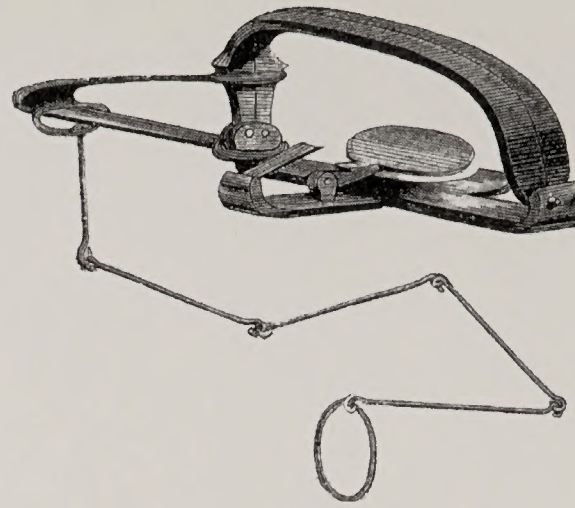
This is of course quite speculative. Other alternatives have been offered. But what they all share is the central fact that Colter made the trip alone, in winter, and on foot and snowshoe. A horse could not have crossed the mountains in winter. Colter depended upon his rifle for food, but probably carried as much dried meat as he could

when he crossed mountain ranges from which snow drives game animals in winter. John Clymer's painting "Colter Visits the Crows—1807" shows Colter dressed in leathers and carrying a rolled up buffalo robe. The robe or a couple of wool blankets and a lean-to shelter would have served as his only cover at night where winter is as fierce as any other area in the Lower 48. During the worst nights the cold probably served as the alarm clock Colter needed to reach out and grab more wood to throw on the fire.

One noteworthy misunderstanding resulted from Colter's trek that Yellowstone Park rangers are still patiently correcting almost two hundred years later. The term "Colter's Hell" fits the Yellowstone thermal phenomena well, even the relatively modest features that Colter would have seen along the western shore of Yellowstone Lake. But a careful study of the contemporary literature points with sufficient authority to the sulfurous thermal areas along the "Stinking Water," now Shoshone, River, as the true "Colter's Hell."<sup>32</sup>

Manuel Lisa was apparently happy with the results of Colter's contact with the Crow tribe, who were generally on good terms with the mountain men who would follow Colter into the Crow country of northern Wyoming and southern Montana. In the spring of 1808 Lisa sent Colter on a similar mission to the Blackfeet. Their well-earned reputation for fiercely protecting their homeland was made possible partly by the firearms they obtained through trade with Canadian fur companies.





*Below and left: Beaver and trap. John Colter was the first "mountain man" and an American wilderness icon.*

Now that the Missouri River was American territory, that trade properly belonged to American firms.

It didn't work out. And Colter may have been responsible. On his way to Blackfoot country, he encountered a large party of Salish and Crow warriors on the Gallatin River. Both tribes were bitter enemies of the Blackfeet. Colter traveled down the Gallatin toward the forks of the Missouri with them, an action that proved to be a costly mistake when the Crows and Salish were attacked by a larger war party of Blackfeet. For some reason, Colter joined the fight against the tribe to whom he had been sent as an emissary. He was wounded in the leg, but man-

aged to make it into a small thicket from which he continued to pick off Blackfeet with his rifle. The Salish and Crow were outnumbered, but they fought well and carried the day. The Blackfoot withdrew to nurse their wounded and their outrage at having been licked by two tribes they normally preyed upon and at the presence in their midst of a white man who fought very well even after being wounded.<sup>33</sup>

Sometime after the battle, other members of Lisa's party crossed the mountains to trap the Three Forks area, including Colter's Lewis and Clark colleague, John Potts. As expected, they found the area so rich in beaver that the thought of the danger they faced

from Blackfoot attack subsided in the anticipation of the fortune they could earn. Working in dugout canoes, smaller versions of the boats they'd used on the Expedition, Potts and Colter probed the side channels, tributaries and beaver ponds of the Jefferson River, baiting their traps, recovering the drowned beavers, and setting the traps for another night.

As they checked the traps one morning by canoe in a stream, they found themselves suddenly surrounded by several hundred Blackfoot warriors lining both banks of the stream. They were trapped, and very likely by some of the same men who had seen Colter in the battle on the Gallatin River. The warriors beckoned them to come to shore. When they reached the bank, a warrior jump-ed to the canoe to claim Potts' rifle. Colter grabbed it away from the Indian and handed it back to Potts, who back paddled away from shore. An impatient warrior, perhaps a youth, shot an arrow into Potts, wounding him. Potts raised his rifle at the warriors and fired. An Indian fell dead, and Potts died instantly under a storm of arrows and bullets. Potts was no fool. He knew that the Blackfeet would literally cut him to pieces. He just wanted to be dead while it happened. It was a very strange and savage place for a man born in a small town in Germany to die.

Potts' rifle shot had deprived the Blackfeet of some fun. After they had taken out their frustration on his corpse, they considered carefully what they might do with Colter for enter-





tainment. First they stripped him naked. They almost decided to use him for target practice, but determined instead to make him race for his life. A chief took Colter several hundred yards away from the band and told him to run. Colter started for the Jefferson River, which was about six miles away. Cactus and rock punctured and tore his bare feet, but he was a good runner and believed he had a chance if he could reach the river. When he had covered about half the distance, he looked back. He saw to his immense relief that he had out-distanced most of the warriors and was confident he could make it to the river, if it were not for the single warrior who had closed to within a hundred yards.

The warrior carried a spear and was slowly gaining. Colter ran as hard as he could, so fast that blood gushed from his nostrils and flowed down his face and chest. When he was within a mile of the river he glanced over his shoulder. The warrior was no more than twenty paces behind him. Before Colter could reach the river, the Indian would be within certain range of a kill. Then the thought came that saved Colter's life. He stopped suddenly and turned around to face the Blackfoot, spreading his arms wide like an angry bear or a demon. The warrior was so startled by the move and by the gore on Colter's body that he stumbled and fell forward. His spear was driven into the ground, breaking the shaft. Colter pulled the head of the spear from the ground, killed the warrior, and ran again.

He reached the river too exhausted to swim so he just threw himself in to

drink and to drift downstream with the current. It was his good fortune that he came soon to an island at the head of which was a large pile of driftwood. Ducking underwater, he swam beneath the logs and came up in the interior of pile at a dark place where he could raise his face above water and yet not be seen from above.

The main body of Indians reached the river screeching "like so many devils" at the disappearance of their prey and the death of their best runner. They searched for Colter for hours, several times running back and forth over his driftwood sanctuary, until night fell. In the darkness Colter swam back into the main current and swam downstream until he reached a point where he thought he could leave the river. Yes, he had escaped. He was alive. He had no clothing, no weapons. On dry land again, he started walking toward Manuel's Fort, some two hundred miles away. It took him a week. When he arrived he was not recognizable as John Colter. Lest this seem like some fantastic tall tale, Colter related the details of his escape to several men who later wrote it about it. There's not much difference in the several versions. Nor is there much evidence that Colter was given to making up whoppers about himself. That aspect of mountain man culture did not begin with Colter.<sup>34</sup>

As soon as winter set in, and he had recovered, Colter started back to the Three Forks after his traps. He and Potts had quickly slipped them over the side of the canoe when the Blackfeet caught them. Without traps, and they

were costly, he had no way of making a living. In winter, Colter figured, the Blackfeet would be quietly holed up in their tepees in some sheltered valley. On his way to Three Forks, Colter camped one night near the Gallatin River. He was cooking a piece of buffalo meat for supper when he heard in the dark woods beyond the campfire the "click" of several guns being cocked. In an instant he jumped over the fire and into the night, several bullets whipping by around him. Once again, Colter fled eastward to the fort.<sup>35</sup>

It was probably of little comfort to Colter that his enemies had such respect for him that they had tried to assassinate him from cover rather than try to take him alive. His luck with the Blackfeet was running out, and he knew it. When spring came in 1809, he went with the party taking the furs down the river. He is known to have gone at least as far as the Hidatsa villages in North Dakota, but seems to have returned to the fort and spent the winter of 1809-10 there rather than continuing down to St. Louis. In the early spring of 1810 a large party set out from the fort for the Three Forks with the intent of building a new fort in Blackfoot country, seeking to cow the Blackfeet with a show of force. Colter went along as guide.<sup>36</sup>

In early April the party reached the confluence of the Jefferson and Madison Rivers and began a fort on the point of land between them. Colter led a party of trappers up the Jefferson River. It didn't take the Indians long to find them. They killed several men and



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stole some traps and horses. It was the last straw. Colter had had it. He threw his hat on the ground, and vowed that, "If God will only forgive me this time and let me off [,] I will leave the country day after tomorrow—and be d----d if ever I come into it again."

But Colter didn't slink back home. He left the mountains in style, pulling off one more incredible journey. With two companions he left the fort in a dugout canoe on April 22. This is reliably documented. Thirty days later they arrived in St. Louis.<sup>37</sup> This, too, is documented. That's an average of about ninety miles a day down the Missouri River. These fellows didn't drift downriver with the current. They paddled hard.

Colter had been up the river for more than six years when he returned to St. Louis. He looked up his old commander, William Clark. Colter had some stories to tell and there were some blank places on Clark's maps he could fill in. He kept his word. While he wasn't quite fit for life in the town, neither did he ever go back to the mountains. Colter got married and moved up the Missouri some sixty miles to take up a piece of ground near Daniel Boone's farm. "Dan'l" was a grandfather by then, but still spry enough to hunt and trap with John Colter. Now there is a campfire for the imagination: Daniel Boone and John Colter propped up against logs, sharing pipe tobacco and telling stories.<sup>38</sup>

Upstream travelers stopped occasionally to visit with Colter. His advice: stay away from the Blackfeet. In the autumn of 1813 John Colter's skin began to

turn as yellow as the leaves of the cottonwoods. He died of jaundice in November. He was somewhere around forty years old.<sup>39</sup> It would be another ten years before former private John Collins traveled up the Missouri to a violent death at the Arikara villages. John Potts killed by Blackfeet, Peter Weiser vanished with only his name preserved in an Idaho river and town, and John Colter dying in a civilized bed when the wilderness had tried and failed to take him down. Of explorers and men of rivers and mountains, they were first.



## 9

# The Journalists: Frazer and Whitehouse



*Mending torn and worn moccasins became a constant chore during the Expedition. Each member of the Corps probably wore out several dozen pairs. Private Joseph Whitehouse began the Expedition with the advantage of experience as a skin dresser and tailor.*

Historian Donald Jackson called Lewis and Clark the "writingest explorers." The thirteen volumes of the Moulton edition, which promises to be the standard for years to come, include all the known journals kept by Lewis, Clark; Sergeants Charles Floyd, Patrick Gass, and John Ordway; and Private Joseph Whitehouse. Because Lewis and Clark required the sergeants to keep journals, it is believed that the journal of Sgt. Nathaniel Pryor has been lost or destroyed. Nor can anyone say where the journal advertised below might be found:

PROPOSALS FOR PUBLISHING BY  
SUBSCRIPTION

## ROBERT FRAZER'S JOURNAL

FROM ST. LOUIS IN LOUISIANA TO  
THE PACIFIC OCEAN

CONTAINING  
AN ACCURATE DESCRIPTION OF THE  
MISSOURI AND ITS SEVERAL  
BRANCHES; OF THE MOUNTAINS SEP-  
ARATING THE EASTERN FROM THE  
WESTERN WATERS; OF THE  
COLUMBIA RIVER AND THE BAY IT  
FORMS ON THE PACIFIC OCEAN; OF  
THE FACE OF THE COUNTRY IN GEN-  
ERAL; OF THE SEVERAL TRIBES OF  
INDIANS....

TOGETHER WITH  
A VARIETY OF CURIOUS AND INTER-  
ESTING OCCURRENCES DURING A  
VOYAGE OF TWO YEARS FOUR  
MONTHS AND NINE DAYS; CON-  
DUCTED BY CAPTNS. LEWIS AND  
CLARKE—<sup>1</sup>

When the Corps of Discovery returned to St. Louis in September 1806, everyone was naturally eager to learn what they experienced during the Expedition. No doubt the sergeants and privates were the celebrities of the river front taverns, telling tales of an epic adventure that has since come to be regarded as the American Odyssey.

**Private Robert Frazer** was the first member of the Corps of Discovery to offer the public a written account of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. The prospectus quoted above was published



in October 1806—only a month after the return of the Corps of Discovery to St. Louis. "Publishing by subscription" meant that Frazer intended to publish his journal when he had collected \$3.00 each from enough people to cover the cost of editing and printing. He secured Lewis's endorsement, but it carried a warning that Frazer was not qualified to discuss the scientific aspects of the Expedition. Frazer's quick work was a bit embarrassing for Lewis, who was expected to edit and publish the official record of the Expedition. But for reasons lost to history Frazer's journal never appeared in print.<sup>2</sup>

Although he was in the past said to be a fencing instructor from Vermont, more reliable evidence suggests Frazer was a native Virginian.<sup>3</sup> When and where he became a member of the Corps is not known. We do know with certainty that he was originally a member of the return party. Clark and Lewis apparently thought well of him for they transferred him to the permanent party in the fall of 1804 to replace unsuccessful deserter Moses Reed.<sup>4</sup> Like many of his mates, Frazer tested the limits of discipline during the Camp Wood winter of 1804–5. A Clark memorandum in April 1804, states that Frazer "has done bad."<sup>5</sup>

Frazer was apparently a hearty fellow. The journals mentioned only one serious illness: a sunstroke in July 1804. Lewis bled him, a standard treatment that, according to Clark, "revived him much." One can't help but wonder what Frazer may have written in his journal

about what he had "done bad" at Camp Wood and about how revived he actually felt after being tapped for a pint.<sup>6</sup>

During the 1804–5 winter at Ft. Mandan, Frazer was involved in an incident that could quite easily have become a disaster. On February 14, Frazer, Silas Goodrich, John Newman and interpreter George Drouillard went to haul back to the fort meat cached the day before. The men were suddenly surrounded by a large war party of Teton Sioux, members of the tribe with which the explorers had had a tense confrontation several months before. The Indians robbed the soldiers of two horses and debated whether they ought to kill the four men. Two influential warriors balked at the idea, and Frazer and the others were set free. They walked back to the fort, arriving there at midnight. The next day Lewis led out a party in pursuit of the Sioux, but they had left the area.<sup>7</sup>

Frazer and Joseph Whitehouse had something else in common beyond keeping journals. They were both tailors. When the Corps of Discovery reached the Great Falls of the Missouri in June 1805, Frazer and Whitehouse were put to work stitching animal hides to cover the iron frame of Lewis's portable canoe. Lewis designed the boat himself and spent a month at Harper's Ferry superintending the construction of its frame. In concept, Lewis's experiment resembled the Eskimo kayak: a sheath of animal hides stretched, sewn, and sealed over a frame of the proper shape and size.<sup>8</sup>

Its primary virtue was its portability. The iron weighed only forty-four pounds. When it was ready for deployment, willow or other pliable wood for cross would complete the frame. The experiment's hour came at the Great Falls. Here the dugout canoes could be portaged with great difficulty, but not the one remaining pirogue. [The red pirogue had been cached at the mouth of the Marias River.]<sup>9</sup>

Frazer and Whitehouse began sewing on June 24, closely supervised by Lewis. By July 3 their work was almost complete. And then Lewis realized that he might have blundered. As the skins dried, the holes through which the leather thongs were sewn by Frazer and Whitehouse did not seal tightly. They gaped. Perhaps, Lewis thought, the skins weren't dry enough yet. But drying the boat over low fires caused the openings to gape even wider. Predictably, the U.S.S. Lewis's Folly leaked too badly to use. To his credit, Lewis blamed not his tailors but the needles he had selected for the task. In cross-section they were triangular in shape, not round. The edges must have cut the hide too much, creating too big a hole. The failure of the boat was one of Lewis's biggest disappointments on the Expedition.<sup>10</sup>

On August 25, 1805, Frazer fired at some ducks on a beaver pond near Camp Fortunate without first carefully surveying his field of fire. The "ball rebounded from the water and passed within a very few feet of me."<sup>11</sup> The "me" in that journal citation is Captain Lewis. A month later on the Lolo Trail,



Frazer was leading a horse that carried two boxes of lead and gunpowder when the horse fell and rolled a hundred yards down a steep hill into a creek. To the amazement of all, it was not even seriously injured. Lewis considered it "the most wonderful escape I ever witnessed."<sup>12</sup>

In early January 1806 at Ft. Clatsop, Frazer was one of the men who accompanied Clark to see a beached whale at present day Cannon Beach, Oregon. Clark's entry for January 10 states that "after crossing the second creek Frasure informed me that he had lost his big knife...sent him back in serch of his knife.... Frasure behaved very badly, and mutonous...." "Mutinous" is not a word an officer uses lightly, but there is no further detail of Frazer's misconduct in Clark's journal.<sup>13</sup>

Following the Expedition Frazer continued in service to Lewis and Clark. He and Labiche were the two privates who accompanied the officers to Washington, D.C. In March 1807 Frazer delivered to William Clark in Virginia Clark's commission as Brigadier General of the Louisiana Militia and a personal letter from Lewis. The Letter reveals that Frazer was a potential witness at the trial of former Vice President Aaron Burr for treason.

After he killed Alexander Hamilton in a duel, Burr apparently became involved in a grandiose scheme to separate the western states from the union. His precise role is still unclear. The conspiracy collapsed when one of Burr's associates informed Jefferson. General James

Wilkinson, who was, ironically, a co-conspirator, arrested Burr. Frazer visited Clark and continued west to St. Louis. From Kentucky Frazer wrote to Jefferson notifying him that his life had been threatened by Burr's associates. "Whatever may be the fate I shall meet with," he wrote the President, "I have the...consolation to know that I have been...true to my country...I shall perish rather than prove otherwise."<sup>15</sup>

Frazer survived the threats against him. Burr was acquitted in a blatantly political verdict. Frazer settled in the St. Louis area where he seems to have married a woman named Tabitha and fathered two sons, Robert and Lewis.<sup>16</sup> He tangled with the law at least once, in 1809. He was convicted in St. Louis of beating a sheriff "with fists, feet, and sticks." By the 1820s Frazer was living on the Gasconade River in Missouri. He died in 1837 in Franklin County.<sup>17</sup>

**Private Joseph Whitehouse** was born in Virginia about 1775, moved with his family to Kentucky in 1784, and enlisted in the army in 1798. His service records describe him as 5'10" tall with light brown hair, fair complexion and hazel eyes.<sup>18</sup> He transferred to the Corps of Discovery in November 1803 from Captain Russell Bissell's infantry company at Kaskaskia, Illinois. By occupation he was a tailor and skin dresser, skills that proved very valuable on the Expedition, particularly after the uniforms the men had begun the Expedition in wore out and they switched to leather clothing.<sup>19</sup>

In early August 1805 Whitehouse came within a few inches of death. The Corps was ascending the Jefferson River in southwestern Montana. Lewis had gone ahead on foot to scout the river. When he arrived at the confluence of the Jefferson and Big Hole Rivers near present day Twin Bridges, he determined the Jefferson was the proper course. He wrote a note informing Clark of his decision and left it on a green willow shoot where Clark could see it when he reached the confluence. But, the theory goes, a beaver helped itself to the willow and the note was history. Lewis continued up the Jefferson.

When Clark reached the forks, there was no note. He decided to turn right up the Big Hole River because it flowed from the southwest. Clark reasoned thought it should provide the most direct approach to the continental divide portage. When Lewis returned to the forks, footprints revealed to him Clark's error. Lewis sent George Droulliard up the Big Hole River to find Clark, who turned the boats around and headed downstream. As the dugouts descended the Big Hole, Whitehouse wrote:

*...one canoe got up Set and everty perticle of the loading got wet.... I was in the Stern when She Swang & [I] jumped out to prevent hir from turning over but the current took her round So rapid that caught my leg under hir and lamed me & was nearing breaking my leg. lost my Shot pouch powder horn full of powder a bunch of thred and Some mockisons &c.<sup>20</sup>*



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In his description of the accident, Lewis wrote that "the canoe had rubbed him and pressed him to the bottom as she passed over him and had the water been two inches shallower must inevitably have crushed him to death."<sup>21</sup>

One of the unique gifts of Whitehouse's journal is his description of the Expedition through the eyes of the enlisted man, albeit one more educated than many of his peers. And one of the best episodes to explore with Whitehouse may be what many consider to be the most critical of the Expedition: the successful meeting with the Lemhi Shoshone and crossing of the continental divide in August 1805. Our images of this passage are those of Lewis and Clark: Lewis making contact with the tribe and Clark's search for navigable waters. Whitehouse was a member of neither party.

It was shortly after Whitehouse's close call with the canoe that Lewis's advance party set off on foot to find the Lemhi Shoshone. Whitehouse remained with Clark and the main body of the Corps, who were pushing and pulling their dugout canoes up the narrow, shallow Beaverhead River. Only the most unrepentant Pollyanna would consider the Beaverhead a navigable stream at this point. "[I]t is now getting Small crooked & Shole in places," Whitehouse wrote in his journal on August 10, "So that we have to waid and hall the canoes over." At times mosquitoes and horse flies were "very troublesome." Sometimes they had to wade through "soft and boggy areas." Often they were in the river

pulling the boats over "shoals and rapids," their bare feet taking a terrible beating on the cobbled river bottom.<sup>22</sup>

Nor were they getting enough to eat: "poor meat [deer and antelope] alone is not a Strong diet," especially for men working this hard in cold water. At noon of the 16th of August Janey Charbonneau gave the men a pail of serviceberries she had picked. After lunch, "we proceeded on over verry Shallow & Swift water[,] passed up a verry bad rocky rapid where we had to waid up to our middle...." Then two hunters returned with important news: five miles ahead the river forked again; neither branch was navigable. Tomorrow, in other words, river transport was over: no more moving the canoes up a river. But how far were they from the divide portage? And where was Lewis? Had he found the Indians?

After breakfast on the morning of August 17th, 1805, William Clark and his detachment continued up the Beaverhead River. Although the explorers had seen signs of Indians, they had not actually seen or heard any since they left Ft. Mandan in April. That was about to change. According to Whitehouse: "we had proceeded on but a short distance when we were alarmed by several voices that were singing...from the south side of the river...a number of the Snake Nation came to us...they informed us by our interpreter (the Indian woman) that Captain Lewis & party was at the Forks of the River waiting for us." For good

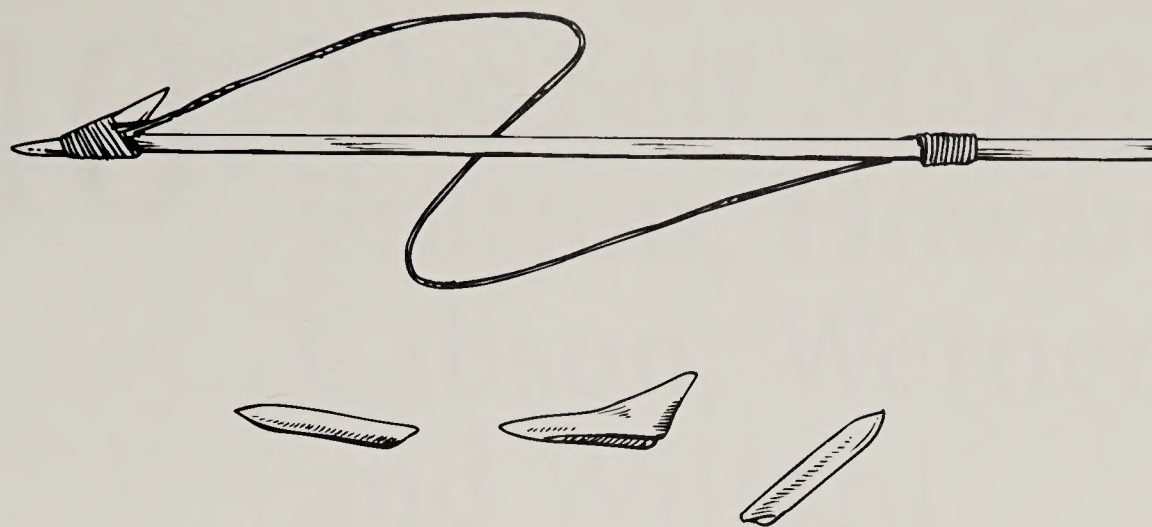
reason they would name the forks of the Beaverhead Camp Fortunate.

Lewis's advance party had found the main camp of the Shoshones two days walk west on the Lemhi River. As they crossed the continental divide at what would come to be known as Lemhi Pass, Lewis and his men were confronted with the discouraging sight of more mountain ranges the west. At the Shoshone village Chief Cameahwait had only bad news about the potential route the Corps might take. Yes, there was a larger river about ten miles northwest of the Lemhi encampment, but it was rocky and swift and turned west to enter an impassable canyon.

And, according to the Indians, there was "No timber on the other side of the Mountains," Whitehouse wrote, "large enough to make canoes.... Captain Lewis informed us that Game is very scarce...the indians informed us, that there is plenty of fish to be caught in the Columbia River." But first, they had to cross the divide. Cameahwait promised that his people and their horses would help.

Whitehouse was a member of the larger detachment who remained at the forks to prepare the Corps' baggage for horse transport while Captain Clark led a reconnaissance party to scout the Salmon River. So important was it to find a navigable river where there was supposed to be one that the officers needed to see for themselves before they disqualified the Salmon River. The Charbonneaus went with Clark's detachment as far as the Shoshone





camp, where they helped organize the Shoshone portage party.

Several Shoshone remained on the Beaverhead with Lewis. Whitehouse was struck by their poverty: "They set a great value on the most trifling article;" and good nature: "they are the most friendly Indians that we have yet met with." The two Lemhi women who stayed behind at Camp Fortunate "employed themselves in making and mending Moccasins for our men." Whitehouse himself, a skin dresser by trade, kept busy tailoring buckskin shirts for the Corps.

Late in the morning of August 22nd Cameahwait, the Charbonneaus, and several dozen other Lemhis returned to the forks to assist in the portage across the pass. No one had any fresh meat, so the whites and Indians joined to make a dragnet of willow branches that they used to seine over five hundred fish from the river. With the fish the, Whitehouse wrote, the Corps served

*a mess of boiled Corn, which [the Lemhis] appeared to be very fond of & They appeared to be very kind and friendly... & behave peaceable, & do not attempt to steal any thing, & borrow nothing but what they return again.—They appear to be in constant dread of the other Nations Indians, who are constantly at Warr with them.*

In addition to the Hidatsa, who had kidnapped Janey on the Missouri

several years before, the Blackfeet and Atsina also preyed upon the Lemhi Shoshones.

Another group of about forty Shoshone arrived from the west on the afternoon of the 23rd. They were headed down to the Missouri River to hunt buffalo. This was dangerous business because it took them to enemy country, but a supply of bison jerky was essential to surviving winter in these mountains. They sold Lewis a few horses before they left. When the combined parties of explorers and Indians headed west for Lemhi Pass on August 24, Lewis had only been able to purchase twelve horses. What baggage they couldn't carry, wrote Whitehouse, "the Indian squaws carried for us [on their horses]."

When they neared the village on the Lemhi River on the 26th, the Shoshones asked the soldiers to fire two rounds from their rifles to entertain their friends and relatives in the camp. That evening, wrote Whitehouse, "...our party had a Dance & the Natives all attended, they seemed pleased with our mode of dancing, and behaved very peaceable & friendly toward us."

"We had a beautiful, pleasant morning," wrote Private Joseph Whitehouse on August 27, 1805. He seems not to have been impressed with the countryside: "barren, broken, and mountaineous." Lewis faced a day of bargaining. He'd only been able to obtain about a dozen horses so far, not nearly enough to transport the Expedition across the Bitterroot Mountains. The Shoshone knew all about horse-trading.

Whitehouse observed that "the natives [don't] wish to part with any more of them, unless [we] gave them considerable more..." Whitehouse saw that the Shoshones shared a common native fondness for gambling. They "played away what Goods they had receiv'd at a game...they keep singing all the while, and do all by motions; most of the Natives play at this game, and seem very little concerned whether they Win or lose,—they always appearing contented & peaceable."

Soldiers and Indians scattered around the valley to find food. Some Shoshone men had a good day of fishing and returned to camp with several Chinook salmon averaging about eight pounds each. The white hunters and anglers brought in four deer and ten large salmon. "Indian women," recorded Whitehouse, "were mostly employed in gathering a kind of small black seed...which they dry & pound or grind...and make a sort of a meal of it. They also dry cherries, service berries, & roots, of different kinds..." Whitehouse's journal offers more insight into the constant danger in the lives of the Lemhi Shoshoni. On the evening of the 27th, after a relatively successful day of hunting and fishing, the Lemhis entertained the Corps with a "warr dance." The men were preparing for the ever-dangerous fall hunting trip to the Missouri.

On the next day, August 28, Whitehouse noted the arrival of two Shoshoni warriors from a band who lived south of the Lemhis and were labeled "Po-hah" on Clark's map. The



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Lemhi leaders held a council with them, but none of the explorers' journals recorded any details. On the following morning, several Lemhi warriors who had been on an extended journey to the east arrived in camp. When they learned that one warrior in the party had been killed and scalped by enemies, "the relations of the dead warrior...set up a terrible Yelling, which was followed by most of the Indians in the village." Sgt. Ordway's journal entry for the day indicates that the warriors weren't sure what tribe had attacked them.

The price of horses increased with news of the attack. The Lemhis told Lewis that, in Whitehouse's words, "[they] do not incline to sell us any more of their horses, without getting Guns and ammunition in return...they must have either horses or guns for their defense." As Cameahwait explained to Lewis, if the Lemhis found that an enemy war party was too large or too well armed to fight, then escape on horseback was surer when there were plenty of spare horses.

The Corps of Discovery departed from their Lemhi hosts on August 30, 1805, with perhaps a better understanding of the precarious nature of their existence. To have enough food to feed their families through the winter, the Lemhi were required to enter a land in which their lives were at risk daily. In fact, another group set out for Lemhi Pass and the buffalo hunting country the same day the Corps left, according to Whitehouse.<sup>23</sup>

Following the Expedition Whitehouse left the army briefly, was arrested for debt, and re-enlisted in 1807. He served through the War of 1812, but for reasons unknown he deserted in 1817. According to Gary Moulton, editor of the most recent publication of the Journals, Whitehouse on his deathbed gave his journal to Canon di Vivaldi, his Catholic confessor, sometime around 1860. The publishing firm Dodd, Mead and Company eventually obtained it. Whitehouse's century old journal was finally published in Reuben G. Thwaites' edition of the Journals.<sup>24</sup>



# 10

## The Salt Makers: Bratton, Howard, Gibson, Werner, and Willard



A wide variety of cold weather clothing is portrayed in this drawing of an Expedition winter hunting party. While the Oregon climate lacked the body-numbing cold of the northern Great Plains, its almost incessant fog, mist and rain were perhaps harder to endure.

The permanent party of the Expedition were together through three winters. On the misery scale, the winter of 1805–6 at Ft. Clatsop may top the list. Precipitation in every form imaginable for all but a few days of the winter depressed the members of the Corps, rotted their clothing, and spoiled elk meat before it could be packed back to

the fort. They suffered from severe colds, fevers, and flu. Hunting and gathering firewood were unpleasant in such a climate but were two of the few available diversions. Unlike the Shoshones of the Rocky Mountains, the coastal Indians were familiar with whites and not that impressed with the Corps. Captains Clark and Lewis at least



had work to do: writing, sketching, and working on maps. The Charbonneaus had a child to tend. For the rest of the men dull gray days passed slowly.

No one could have given the party a better Christmas present that year than they gave themselves: completing the huts that when enclosed would become Fort Clatsop near present Astoria, Oregon. Sgt. Patrick Gass noted in his journal the lack of "spiritous liquors to elevate our spirits," but a shelter from the almost incessant drizzles, downpours, and mists they had endured for weeks was a blessing.<sup>1</sup> There was plenty to eat for Christmas dinner: pounded, dried fish, roots, and tainted elk meat.<sup>2</sup> Many of the men yearned for something to season this dreary fare. The Corps' salt supply had been exhausted, so after Christmas five privates were each given a large kettle and sent to the beach to boil ocean water. They left the fort on December 28th, according to Sgt. John Ordway: "five men Set out by land with kittles to go over to the seacoast to form a Camp and make Some Salt."<sup>3</sup> They set up camp and built a salt works west of Ft. Clatsop at the site of present day Seaside, Oregon. The men built a furnace of stones, gathered firewood, filled the kettles with seawater, boiled them down, scraped the salt out of the kettles, and packed it away. Hunting and bartering with the natives provided food for the salt camp.<sup>4</sup>

It was not particularly difficult work, but strenuous, particularly hauling driftwood. Compared to the fort in the forest, the salt camp was in a relatively

exposed location, particularly to the wind that was to a certain extent absorbed by the tall trees and dense underbrush around the fort. But the salt makers were free of the claustrophobia of the forest. There was a horizon and on some days there were sunsets that must have made the whole trip worth every minute. No other Euro-Americans had ever worked so hard or come so far to appreciate a view. Men with a taste for contemplation might look out across the waves rolling up the sand and shingle to the swells beyond.

The men who had a taste for salt, which seems to have been perhaps everyone but Clark, began to wonder after a few days why no one had brought any salt back to the fort. On January 3rd Sgt. Gass and Private Shannon were sent to investigate. Getting there turned out to be a little tricky. It took them three days.<sup>5</sup> In the meantime two of the salt crew had returned to Ft. Clatsop by another route with the first salt. Lewis was impressed with the result. "We find it excellent, fine, strong & white; this is a great treat to myself and most of the party...."<sup>6</sup>

For several more weeks the salt makers kept their "kittles" boiling. Then on February 8th one of the crew, Private Alexander Willard, injured his knee so badly with a tomahawk he was forced to return to Fort Clatsop.<sup>7</sup> When he reached the fort, Willard told the officers that two of the other salt makers, William Bratton and George Gibson, were ill and needed to be helped back to the fort. Sgt. Nathaniel

Pryor and a small party went to help them and take over their work. By the 17th of February four bushels of salt had been processed. Lewis decided that was enough. He sent Sgt. John Ordway and a crew with a canoe to help carry the salt, kettles and camp equipment back to the fort. The salt makers had completed their mission.<sup>8</sup>

**Private William Bratton** managed to walk back to the fort, but Gibson had to be carried in a blanket. Gibson recovered rapidly, however, and was soon back to normal. But Bratton's condition worsened and he was confined to his bed for weeks. On March 21 a concerned Lewis wrote in his journal: "Bratton is so much reduced that I am somewhat uneasy with respect to his recovery...."<sup>9</sup>

William Bratton was one of the "young men from Kentucky" recruited for the Corps of Discovery by William Clark. He was born in Virginia on July 29, 1778, and moved with his family to Kentucky about 1790. Bratton was a tall, muscular man, and had some experience as a gunsmith and blacksmith.<sup>10</sup> Bratton had the respect of both the officers and the enlisted men. He was one of the men sent after the deserters Reed and LaLiberte and he served in John Newman's court-martial. When Sgt. Charles Floyd died in August 1804, Bratton was runner-up to Patrick Gass in the vote to replace Floyd.<sup>11</sup>

Like the other members of the Corps, Bratton was at times afflicted with painful boils. On May 11, 1805, they hurt so badly that Bratton got



A blacksmith's cap of the type that may have been worn by the Corps of Discovery's blacksmiths: John Shields, Alexander Willard, and William Bratton. They fashioned iron hardware for the boats, made tools and weapons used in trade with Indians, and kept the Corps' firearms in working condition.



permission to go ashore to hunt. It almost cost him his life. At about 5 p.m. he came running toward the boats "with loud cries, and every symptom of terror and distress." When he recovered his breath, Bratton said that he had wounded a grizzly, which had then pursued him closely for some distance. Lewis and a small party backtracked the bear and found him holed up in thick brush. They dispatched the bear with two balls to the head. When they examined the carcass, they discovered that Bratton's ball had gone through the center of the grizzly's lungs. Mortally wounded, the grizzly had nevertheless pursued Bratton half a mile, run back another mile on a reverse course, and dug a bed in dense underbrush.<sup>12</sup> The "white bears" were awesome. Two weeks later, on May 25, 1805, Bratton was one of three hunters who killed the expedition's first bighorn sheep.<sup>13</sup> In early July Bratton was assigned to help make tar from pine pitch in an unsuccessful attempt to seal the hide seams on Lewis's experimental iron framed boat near the Great Falls of the Missouri.<sup>14</sup>

But Bratton is best remembered for the mysterious, debilitating illness he contracted at the salt camp. Clark noted the symptoms in his journal on February 16th: "Bratton is very weak and complains of a pain in the lower part of the back when he moves...."<sup>15</sup> Lewis administered "peruvian barks," or quinine, for several days without much effect. On the 21st he gave Bratton "a doze of Scotts pills," a medicine not identified in the journals. That didn't help, either.<sup>16</sup>

Bratton's pain was so severe at times that he could not get out of bed. He got temporary relief from a liniment Lewis concocted of alcohol, camphor, castile soap, and laudanum.<sup>17</sup> Clark on March 15th again described Bratton as "very weak and unwell."<sup>18</sup> By that date the Corps was making preparations for the trip home and an invalid would find travel very difficult. When they headed back up the Columbia River, Bratton was made as comfortable as possible in the bottom of a dugout canoe.<sup>19</sup> In April, near the confluence of the Columbia and Snake rivers, the Corps abandoned their canoes and set out overland across the prairies to the Clearwater River home of the Nez Percés.<sup>20</sup> Still unable to walk, Bratton rode horseback. When the Expedition reached the site of present day Kamiah, Idaho, they were forced to camp for almost a month while waiting impatiently for snow to melt on the Lolo Trail. Bratton's chronic condition continued to baffle Lewis. On May 24 Lewis wrote that Bratton:

*"is so weak in the loins that he is scarcely able to walk four or five steps, nor can he set upwright but with the greatest pain. we have tried every remedy which our engenuity could devise, or within our stock of medicines furnished us, without effect."*<sup>21</sup>

Then Private John Shields had an idea. He told Lewis that he had seen men in Bratton's condition "restored by violent sweats." Shields dug a hole four feet deep and three feet in diameter. He then lit a large fire in the pit. When the

wood and coals had been consumed, Bratton was placed naked in the hole on boards that supported his buttocks and feet and given a bucket of water. The pit was then covered by a framework of willows and draped with blankets to form something like an Indian sweat lodge. Shields instructed Bratton to create steam by splashing water on the hot bottom and sides of the hole. He also drank large quantities of horsemint tea. After twenty minutes Bratton was brought out, plunged into cold water twice, then helped back into the hole for a forty-five minutes session. Finally, he was removed, wrapped in blankets, and allowed to cool gradually. It worked. By the next morning, Bratton was on his feet and on his way to complete recovery.<sup>22</sup>

Following the Expedition, Bratton returned to Kentucky briefly before moving to Missouri. He enlisted in the War of 1812 against Great Britain, apparently serving in both the militia and in a U.S. volunteer infantry regiment. On January 22, 1813, he was among the men who fell prisoner to a combined British/Canadian/Indian force at the Battle of Frenchtown on the Raisin River near present day Monroe, Michigan. The Indians massacred several dozen prisoners, many of them wounded in the battle, after they had surrendered. Bratton survived the massacre and was later released in a prisoner exchange. He fought in the Battle of the Thames on October 5, 1813, an American victory considered by the men who fought there as revenge for the "Raisin River Massacre."<sup>23</sup>



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Bottom: Expedition fiddlers  
Pierre Cruzatte and George  
Gibson entertained their Indian  
hosts in such earth lodges during  
the 1804–5 winter in present  
North Dakota.

Bratton settled in Indiana after the war and in November 1819 wed Mary Maxwell. The couple lived at Greenville, Ohio, for three years, and then settled near Waynetown, Indiana. Bratton was the justice of the peace in his township for five years. In twenty-two years of marriage the couple were parents to two daughters and eight sons. William Bratton, victim of one of the most famous backaches in American history, died in 1841 at the age of sixty-three.<sup>24</sup>

**Private Thomas Howard**, another salt maker, came close to a flogging in 1805. The Lewis and Clark Expedition spent the long, brutally cold winter of 1804–5 at Ft. Mandan near present Bismarck, N. Dakota. The fort, like Ft. Clatsop, consisted of two rows of log huts surrounded by a log palisade. Small and crude, it was nevertheless an official outpost of the U.S. Army and standard security procedures were scrupulously maintained. Not that the neighboring Mandan or Hidatsa Indians were hostile, far from it. They were indeed so friendly as to become at times almost a nuisance. The tribes were used to Euro-American visitors. British and French traders had lived among them for years. With one village right across the iced-over Missouri River from the fort, it didn't take long for the members of the Corps of Discovery to take advantage of Mandan hospitality.

On the night of February 9, 1805, Captain Meriwether Lewis gave Private Thomas Howard permission to visit the Mandans. It was late when Howard returned to the fort. He found the gate

shut. Despite the late hour and the bitter cold, a sentry was on duty within the walls. The standard procedure was for Howard to call out to the sentry, identify himself, and, perhaps, utter a password as well. For reasons now lost to history, Howard chose to, in Lewis's words, "scale the works" of the palisade rather than present himself at the gate. This in itself was bad enough. But a couple of young Mandans had followed Howard back to the fort and saw him climb over the wall. One of them—on a dare from the other?—decided to follow Howard's example. Once over the wall he was quickly discovered. Lewis was summoned:

*I convinced the Indian of the impropriety of his conduct, and explained to him the riske he had run of being severely treated, the fellow appeared much alarmed, I*

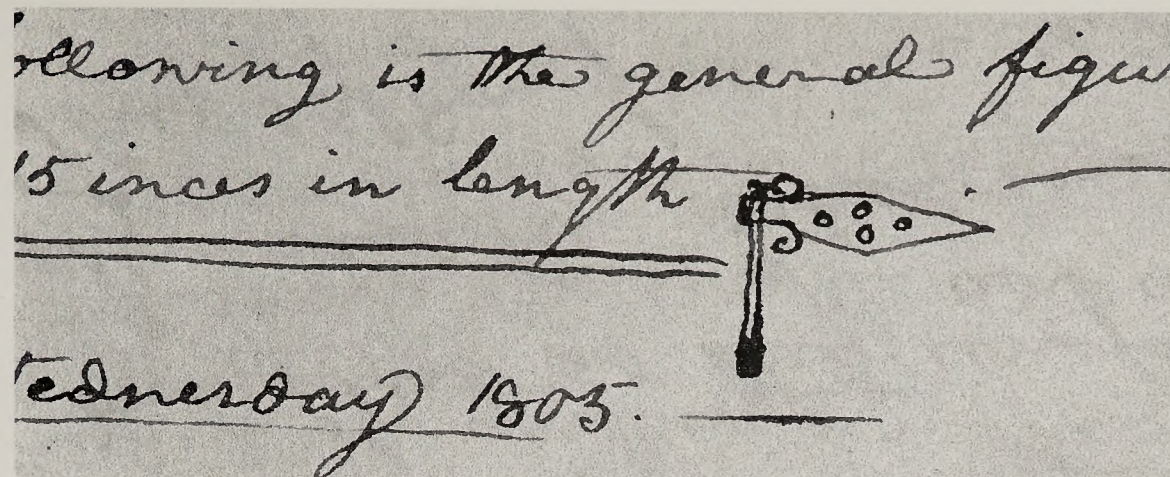
*gave him a small piece of tobacco and sent him away[.] Howard I comitted to the care of the guard with a determination to have him tryed by a Courtmartial for this offence. this man is an old soldier which stills hightens this offence.*<sup>25</sup>

Lewis was right. Howard should have known better. A native of Brimfield, Massachusetts, Howard was twenty-two when he joined the army in 1801 and was a member of the 2nd U.S. Infantry when he signed on with the Corps.<sup>26</sup> Howard was tried at noon on the 10th, found guilty, and sentenced to fifty lashes.<sup>27</sup> From Sergeant John Ordway's journal we learn that an appeal was made "to the mercy of the commanding officer...."<sup>28</sup> Howard was fortunate. No more floggings: the cat o'nine tails was permanently de-commissioned from the Expedition.





Battle axes forged by such Expedition blacksmiths as Alexander Willard proved to be popular trade items.



Was Howard drunk that night? Perhaps: Clark wrote at Camp Wood that Howard "never drinks water," not a literal truth but what may be interpreted as a measure of his capacity for strong drink.<sup>29</sup>

Howard and Private William Werner were apparently not at the salt works for the duration but did help carry salt back to the fort. On January 23, 1806, Lewis sent them on just such a detail. Under good conditions the trip took a day both ways. When three days had passed and they hadn't returned, Lewis was "apprehensive that they have lost their way; neither of them are very good woodsmen." But they showed up two days later; bad weather had slowed their progress.<sup>30</sup>

There are relatively few other references to Howard in the journals. He suffered a bad case of constipation in May 1806<sup>31</sup> and hurt his leg two months later when it got pinched between a canoe and a log.<sup>32</sup> Howard apparently settled near St. Louis when the Expedition ended. One Thomas Howard was a member of Captain H. Stark's company of the U.S. 1st Infantry Regiment in 1808. This may or may not have been our Howard. Our man married a woman named Genevieve Roy and died in 1818. His son Joseph followed his father's footsteps and entered the Rocky Mountain fur trade.<sup>33</sup>

**Private George Gibson** became so ill at the salt camp that for a while he could not even sit up without assistance. Sgt. Pryor was dispatched with a crew of four men to carry Gibson back to Fort

Clatsop. He had begun to recover slightly, but was still very weak when they brought him to the fort. There he was subjected to the Lewis and Clark Traveling Medicine Show: saltpeter, laudanum, laxative, and Jesuit's bark. Gibson was soon on his feet, but it's impossible to say with certainty whether or not his recovery was as a result of the prescribed therapy.<sup>34</sup>

He's not well known, but George Gibson was certainly one of the most versatile and valuable members of the Expedition. He could hunt, play the fiddle, speak in Indian sign language, and handle a boat. In fact, he was at different times the lead boatman in both a pirogue and a dugout.<sup>35</sup> His standing among the men was such that he placed third in the election to replace Sgt. Charles Floyd when Floyd died in August 1804.<sup>36</sup>

During the construction of Ft. Clatsop Gibson contracted dysentery.<sup>37</sup> Gibson's only serious injury during the Expedition resulted from a mishap on the return journey in 1806, when he was a member of Clark's party on the Yellowstone River. Gibson slipped while attempting to mount his horse and fell backwards onto a dead tree. A sharp, broken branch gouged its way two inches deep into his thigh. Clark wrote in his journal the day after the accident that Gibson "slept but very little last night and complain[s] of great pain in his knee and hip as well as his thy [sic]."<sup>38</sup>

Gibson's friends padded a saddle with several layers of blankets and skins the next morning. Gibson was able to ride

for about two and half hours before the pain became too intolerable to stay on the horse. Since Gibson could no longer ride, Clark decided they might as well stop to make dugout canoes and give Gibson's leg a chance to heal.<sup>39</sup> Following his return to St. Louis, Gibson got married a woman named Maria Reagan. He died in 1809.<sup>40</sup>

**Private William Werner** got off to a bad start with the Corps of Discovery. In January 1804 he was disciplined for fighting with John Potts at Camp Wood.<sup>41</sup> Four months later he was one of the men who got in trouble over their attendance at a dance in St. Charles, Missouri.<sup>42</sup> But after that he seems to have settled down pretty well. He was for at least a portion of the journey the cook for Sgt. John Ordway's squad.<sup>43</sup> When the Corps split up at Travelers' Rest on the return trip in 1806, Werner was one of the detachment under Sgt. Patrick Gass who went to the Great Falls to raise the cache dug there in 1805 and prepare a cart for the long portage around the Falls. The canoes they would help portage were taken from the Forks of the Beaverhead down to the falls by another detachment commanded by Sgt. John Ordway.

Because Lewis was off exploring the Marias River and Clark was on the upper Yellowstone River, the events at the falls are among the few not recorded by one of the officers. We rely upon Gass, who was left at the falls with Werner, Frazer, Goodrich, McNeal and Thompson; and Ordway, who reached Gass's camp on July 19 with



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Colter, Collins, Cruzatte, Willard, Weiser, Whitehouse, Howard, LePage, and Potts.

To complete the portage was difficult enough under the best of circumstances, but they weren't even close to the best of circumstances. The mosquitoes were more troublesome than ever because they had no mosquito netting and their clothing was ripped and torn. The only relief possible was a stiff wind or the fickle smoke of a campfire. As it was, the exhausted men often found it impossible to sleep. Ordway also described the horses as "covered thick with Mosquitoes and Small flies." The suffering horses went missing for a couple of days, forcing the men to pull and push the heavy carts across the cactus-covered plain. An axletree on one of the carts broke and had to be returned to camp for repairs. A hailstorm lashed them in the open and muddied the track. The carts sunk in to the axle. Cartwheels broke and had to be repaired and replaced. Private Weiser cut his leg with a knife so severely he was unable to walk. A series of heavy rains made progress all but impossible. Caught on the plain, several men were forced to bivouac under an upturned canoe without food or firewood.

Yet within a week, they had somehow portaged five canoes around the falls. The white pirogue hidden at the falls the previous summer was found to be sound and re-commissioned in the Lewis and Clark fleet. John Colter and John Potts, canoe partners a few years before their fatal encounter with the Blackfeet, ran the canoes through some rapids below the falls. Sgt. Gass and

Private Willard set out with the horses for the mouth of the Marias River, where they expected to meet Lewis's party. Ordway and the rest of the men ran the boats down.

On July 28 they reached the Marias and, in Ordway's words, "discovered on a high bank a head Capt. Lewis & the three men who went with him...coming toward us...we...fired the Swivell [gun] to Salute him and party." Those familiar with the Expedition will recall that Lewis's party had ridden hard from the scene of a skirmish with Indians, probably Blackfoot, that left two warriors dead. The coincidental arrival at the mouth of the Marias of both detachments is yet another one of the odds-against lucky breaks of the Expedition. The explorers found that the red pirogue left at the Marias was "too rotten to take down the river." Anticipating the possible arrival of a Blackfeet war party seeking revenge, the explorers freed the horses, threw the saddles into the river, and set out down the Missouri. Pursued by rain, hail, wind and lightning, Lewis and his men "proceeded on fast" toward their rendezvous with Clark.<sup>44</sup>

Concerning the fate of William Werner, there is speculation that Clark employed him as an Indian Agent. In the late 1820s Clark listed him as living in Virginia.<sup>45</sup>

By 1852 **Alexander Hamilton Willard** was one of the only four known living members of the Expedition. That year, forty-eight years after he started up the Missouri with the Corps of

Discovery, he moved to California. Willard's second crossing of the continent was much different than his first, but still a tough trip for anyone regardless of age or gender. The road to California had been pounded deep into the plains and Great Basin by thousands of emigrants and their livestock by 1852. The discomforts and dangers were many: heat, cold, thunderstorms, wind, river crossings, bad water, no water, no grass, no fuel, dust, insects, Indians, and—above all—disease. Even if everything went about as well as could be hoped for, there was still the monotony and fatigue of six months passing by in an endless succession of days spent riding or walking fifteen miles, fifteen miles, fifteen miles.... Not something that many seventy-four year old men would consider taking on.

Alexander Willard was still in his twenties when he was transferred from Captain Amos Stoddard's artillery company to the Corps of Discovery in December 1803. He stood 5'10" tall and had brown hair and a dark complexion. Willard hailed from Charleston, New Hampshire: one of the few New England Yankees in the Corps. He was a blacksmith by trade, a skill that placed him a little above a regular private in status and pay. But on the Expedition there were no privileged soldiers.<sup>46</sup>

Not much is recorded about Private Willard until Captains Lewis and Clark considered executing him on July 12, 1804. The charge was very serious: "lying down and sleeping on his post whilst a sentinel." Because falling



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asleep on guard duty put the lives of the entire party at risk, a soldier found guilty could face the death penalty. Although the captains formed courts martial from the enlisted men and sergeants for all other violations, Lewis and Clark themselves were required as officers to serve as judge and jury for capital offenses. Willard, his life on the line, pled guilty to lying down but denied falling asleep on guard duty. Lewis and Clark found him guilty on both counts and sentenced him to a hundred lashes, twenty-five a day beginning that day at sunset and continuing the next three days. He would bear the scars the rest of his life, but he at least had a life.<sup>47</sup>

In June 1805 Willard almost lost his life to a grizzly bear. He was one of a small detachment with Clark scouting the Great Falls of the Missouri portage. They made camp above the falls one evening and shot several buffalo. According to Clark's journal, "Willard[,] going for a load of meat...was attack by a white bear [grizzly] and verry near being Caught, prosued within 40 yards of camp." Seeing the other men in camp and perhaps alarmed at being suddenly outnumbered, the grizzly changed course and headed toward the lower point of an island, right at John Colter. The bear chased Colter into the river, but was it deprived again of a kill and a meal by the timely arrival of Clark and his men. The bear ran off. The excitement over, Clark returned to camp. Since no one had been harmed, it was perhaps an appropriate time to have a discussion with Private Willard about alternatives to running toward

your commanding officer with a mad grizzly on your heels.<sup>48</sup>

In early February 1806 at the salt works Willard cut his leg badly, perhaps while chopping firewood. He made it safely back to the fort, where he joined a growing list of patients under the care of their officer/physicians. Willard became ill and was confined to his bed for over a month. Besides the injured knee, his early symptoms included fever, headache and loss of appetite. When in doubt about the proper course of treatment, the captains administered by default a strong purgative. Lewis did it to Willard and on the following day reported that his patient had improved. But it was only temporary and Willard's condition worsened during the next few weeks. Lewis noted in his journal on March 8th that Willard was "yet complaining and low spirited."<sup>49</sup>

Two weeks later Willard was gaining ground but was still weak. Lewis attributed the slow recovery of Willard and Private William Bratton to "the want of proper food." The diet of fish, roots, and tainted elk flesh was one of the worst aspects of the Ft. Clatsop winter. Willard at least was able to walk when the Corps headed up the Columbia River in late March;<sup>50</sup> Bratton would not recover completely for two more months. One further mishap awaited Willard on the way home. On August 4 he and Sgt. Ordway had been hunting and were headed down the Missouri River to camp. The canoe they were in hit a submerged log, throwing Willard out and leaving him temporarily stranded. He simply tied two logs

together for a raft and floated on down to camp.<sup>51</sup>

After the expedition Willard apparently lived in St. Louis. He married Eleanor McDonald, age sixteen, of Shelbyville, Kentucky, in 1808. Both Lewis and Clark, in their official capacities for Louisiana and Missouri Territories, appointed Willard to the position of blacksmith for several Indian tribes, Lewis to the Sauks and Foxes and Clark to the Shawnees and Delawares. He was in St. Louis in 1811 when word arrived of the Battle of Tippecanoe. Clark sent Willard up the Mississippi to warn settlers to beware of war parties of the defeated Indians who might extract a private revenge by taking a scalp on the way home. Willard re-joined the army when the War of 1812 began and fought against Tecumseh's Indian confederation.

Willard and his wife had twelve children. One son they named Lewis, another Clark. In 1824 the Willards moved to a farm in Wisconsin. At age fifty-four he served in the militia during the Blackhawk War of 1832. When Willard and his wife migrated to California in 1852 in ox drawn wagons, they were accompanied by four of their seven sons and all five daughters. They lived first in Yolo County but moved to the Sacramento area in 1859. Alexander Willard passed away on March 6, 1865. He was eighty-seven. Of the members of the Corps whose destinies are recorded, only Sgt. Patrick Gass and Jean Baptiste Charbonneau were still alive.<sup>52</sup>







# 11

## Indian Troubles: McNeal, Joseph, and Reuben Field



**Captain Lewis Shooting an Indian.** [Mathew Carey edition of Patrick Gass journal, 1810]

*A fanciful, inaccurate portrayal of the deadly skirmish with Atsina or Blackfeet warriors at Two Medicine River, Montana. There were only four men in Lewis's party. Lewis mortally wounded an Indian with his pistol, not a rifle.*

**Private Hugh McNeal** was one of the members of small party from Ft. Clatsop who went with William Clark to the Oregon coast to see a beached whale. The local Tillamook and Clatsop Indians had already stripped the carcass of flesh and blubber and were making great quantities of whale oil. One evening several Indians from a nearby village came out to visit and smoke with Clark at his camp on a small river.<sup>1</sup>

"...about bedtime," Clark wrote in his journal, "I herd a hollowing in the opposite side of the river which alarmed all the Indian about me." The Indians jumped up and ran toward the village. Clark suspected, with good reason, that one of his men "was over after the Squars." He did a quick head count. Sure enough, McNeal was missing.

Clark sent Sgt. Nathaniel Pryor and four men to the village to find McNeal. They met him running back toward camp. The people in the village had been alarmed by something, McNeal gasped, but he had no idea what was wrong. When he had recovered his breath, McNeal said that while he was in the village an apparently friendly Tillamook man had invited him into a lodge. McNeal started to go with him, but a Chinook woman grabbed the blanket McNeal had draped around his shoulders to pull him back and prevent him from going. Another woman shouted something at the Tillamook man, who then ran off into the darkness.

When the uproar had subsided, the Indians explained to Clark what had happened. McNeal's Tillamook "friend,"



according to the Chinook women, intended to get him alone in a lodge and then murder him for his blanket and any other items he was carrying. Familiar with the terrain, the man had probably figured on getting away in the darkness. Only one man died on the Expedition, but one may have come close to being murdered.<sup>2</sup>

Had McNeal been killed, his murder would have grave consequences for the Corps' relations with the tribes near Ft. Clatsop. Thomas Jefferson had instructed Lewis to treat the Indians "in the most friendly and conciliatory manner which their own conduct would admit."<sup>3</sup> Fortunately, Lewis and Clark did not have to respond to McNeal's murder. Relations with the coastal tribes were already less than satisfactory for the Expedition. The stock of trade goods had dwindled to low levels at a time when the Corps were the uninvited guests of tribes who knew a thing or two about how to trade with whites from their dealing with the traders who had been coming in ships to the Northwest coast for several years. As far as the explorers were concerned, the Oregon Indians did not compare favorably with the Mandans, Shoshones, Montana Salish, and Nez Percés.<sup>4</sup>

This did not prevent the men from having intercourse with the "lude" Chinook women. Like Silas Goodrich, Hugh McNeal apparently contracted venereal disease that winter. Lewis treated McNeal with mercury, the standard prescription. McNeal seems at first not to have taken his illness too seriously,

for Lewis discovered three weeks after his diagnosis that McNeal's symptoms had worsened through McNeal's own "inattention."<sup>5</sup> Attentive treatment achieved good results by March, but by July the secondary symptoms had appeared.<sup>6</sup> Of course, "the pox" was nothing unusual for soldiers, particularly those at frontier outposts. How long McNeal had been in the army when he joined the Corps is unknown. At Camp Wood he was assigned to Sgt. Charles Floyd's squad.<sup>7</sup>

McNeal is mentioned only infrequently in the Expedition journals. Perhaps his most prominent "role" was a member of Lewis's advance party in August 1805. On August 12th, McNeal had the pleasure of doing what he and his comrades had been looking forward to since May 1804: conquering the Missouri River. Lewis's party was ascending Trail Creek to what the Corps would consider the source of the Missouri and the continental divide at Lemhi Pass. "Two miles below [the divide]," Lewis wrote, "McNeal had exultantly stood with a foot on each side of this little rivulet and thanked his god that he had lived to bestride the mighty and heretofore deemed endless Missouri."<sup>8</sup>

On the return journey in 1806 McNeal once again narrowly avoided death. When Lewis's detachment reached the Great Falls, Lewis sent McNeal to examine the pirogue and cache the Corps had left at the foot of the falls the previous summer. A startled grizzly suddenly rose from brush so close to McNeal that he instinctively swung his rifle like a club, hitting the bear in the

head and breaking the gun. This slowed the bear down long enough to give McNeal time to climb a tree. McNeal and grizzly studied each other for several hours before the bear wandered away and McNeal was able to climb down and hightail back it to camp.<sup>9</sup>

Following the Expedition McNeal disappeared from history. Clark listed him as dead by the late 1820s. It's not impossible that his nocturnal visit to the Chinook women that January evening in 1806 did indeed eventually take him to his grave.<sup>10</sup>

**Joseph and Reuben Field** were brothers, the sons of Abraham and Betty Field. The Field family emigrated from Virginia to Jefferson County, Kentucky in 1784. Joseph was about ten years old at the time, Reuben twelve. When William Clark sought "woodsmen" for the Expedition in October 1803 the Field brothers were exactly the kind of men Lewis had counted on Clark recruiting.<sup>11</sup>

Joseph apparently stayed out of trouble during the winter at Camp Wood, Illinois, but Reuben was one of the several new soldiers who didn't always respect the authority of the sergeants left in charge of the camp when the officers were absent. In early March 1804 Reuben refused to serve his turn at guard duty, was rebuked by Lewis, repented and got off without severe punishment. One senses that Reuben had already made a strong and good impression upon the officers.<sup>12</sup>

Both brothers were superb marksmen



*An American having struck a Bear but not killed him, escaped into a Tree. [Mathew Carey edition of Patrick Gass journal, 1810]*

*The grizzly left late in the evening, allowing Hugh McNeal to find his horse and return to camp with a story to tell.*



and hunters. Joseph, Reuben, John Colter, and interpreter George Drouillard were also the best scouts in the Corps. They ranged ahead of the boats, hunting, searching for signs of Indians, carrying messages between the officers, and collecting information about geographical features when Lewis and Clark did not have the time to investigate themselves. No other members of the Corps were better wilderness hands.

When game, especially, bison, began to grow scarce on the tributaries of the Missouri, the Field brothers walked upriver in the early morning to hunt. When they killed an animal, they dressed it and left it hanging in a conspicuous spot for the other men to collect as they moved slowly upstream with the boats. Both Joseph and Reuben claimed hunting "firsts." Reuben killed a condor on the lower Columbia on November 18, 1805.<sup>13</sup> Two weeks later Joseph shot the first elk the Corps had seen west of the Rockies.<sup>14</sup> Joseph was also a carpenter and fashioned the willow cross stays for Lewis's ill-fated iron frame boat above Great Falls.<sup>15</sup> At Ft. Clatsop he made rough furniture for the officers' quarters.<sup>16</sup>

On the journey home in 1806, Lewis selected the Field brothers and George Drouillard, his best men, for perhaps

the most controversial detached mission of the entire Expedition. The Corps had explored the lower Marias River in June 1805 when they were trying to determine whether it was the Missouri or not. They had correctly decided it was not, but it that didn't diminish its importance as far as Lewis was concerned. The Louisiana Purchase had transferred possession of the Missouri watershed to the United States. The Marias River was a major tributary flowing from the unknown north. If possible, Lewis wanted to go far enough up the river to find out where exactly the border between the United States and Canada was. He and his men were the first Americans to actually see what the government had bought.<sup>17</sup>

The small party rode up the Marias about a week to learn, to Lewis's disappointment, that its course was west to east. By July 22, Lewis had "lost all hope of the waters of this river extending to N Latitude 50."<sup>18</sup> On the morning of July 26 they broke camp and set out for the Missouri and their planned rendezvous with the detachments of Sergeants Ordway and Gass, who were bringing the boats down from the Great Falls. That afternoon Lewis and the Field brothers were riding east on the plateau south of the Two Medicine River. Drouillard was riding a parallel course along the river below them.

Lewis suddenly spotted a party of Indians with about thirty horses on a hill about a mile ahead.<sup>19</sup>

Through his telescope Lewis saw that the Indians had spotted Drouillard, "...a very unpleasant site," but seemed unaware of the Field brothers and himself. There was no choice now but to advance toward the Indians to let them know that Drouillard was not alone before they attacked him. Lewis had Joseph Field hold an American flag aloft as they rode slowly toward the Indians. When the warriors finally noticed Lewis and the Fields, they became very agitated. One of them galloped his horse full speed at them, reined in when he was about a hundred yards away, looked them over, and then raced back to his companions.

They were close enough now that Lewis could count them: eight. Lewis expected that the warriors would try to rob him, "in which case...I should resist to the last extremity preferring death to...being deprived of my papers, instruments, and gun." One Indian advanced ahead of the others. Lewis approached him and shook his hand. The greeting became general and both parties dismounted for a talk [in sign language] and a smoke. There is some controversy about what tribe the warriors belonged to. Lewis asked them if they were



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Minnetarees of Fort de Prairie, known also as Gros Ventres or Atsinas. Most scholars have claimed that Lewis was wrong, citing subsequent accounts of the encounter that indicate that these were Pikuni: Piegan Blackfeet. [Robert Saindon argues persuasively that they were Gros Ventres in his article "The Unhappy Affair on Two Medicine River in the August 2002 edition of *We Proceeded On*.]

It was growing late. Lewis invited the Indians to camp with him for the night. He couldn't resist the opportunity to talk politics with these warriors and a show of confidence would send the proper message at this point about the abilities of his own warriors. Around the campfire that night they told Lewis about the trade in furs and hides they carried on with Canadians. The Indians claimed to be part of a large band that was camped a day and a half's ride to the west. Lewis told them about the contacts and discussions he and Clark had been having with other tribes. If these men were either Atsina or Blackfoot warriors, they were no doubt dismayed to learn that he had made peaceful contact with Shoshone, Salish, and Nez Perce, and had promised them that American traders would be coming to trade guns for furs, as the Blackfeet did with the Canadians.

Lewis took the first watch that night after the other men had gone to bed. When Reuben Field replaced Lewis, all the Indians seemed to be fast asleep. Lewis suspected that at the least the warriors would try to steal their horses. He told Reuben to wake him if he saw

any Indian get up and leave the camp. But the night passed quietly.

At dawn the Indians gathered around the campfire. Joseph Field, who was on watch, committed one of the worst mistakes of the entire Expedition. Reuben was asleep behind him. Joseph had carelessly placed his own rifle on the ground behind his back, next to his brother. An alert warrior slipped behind Joseph, grabbed Joseph and Reuben's guns, and ran for the horses. Two other warriors snatched up rifles belonging to Lewis and Drouillard and took off with them.

Joseph woke his brother and they started after the Indian who had their guns. The Fields were two of the fastest men in the Corps and quickly caught up with the thief. Reuben had drawn his knife. As he and Joseph jerked their rifles from the startled Indian's grasp, Reuben stabbed him in the chest. As Lewis wrote later, "the fellow ran about 15 steps and fell dead."

Drouillard, who was awake, yelled, "Damn you! Let go my gun!" He wrestled the gun away from the Indian who had tried to take it. Drouillard's shout woke Lewis, who reached for his rifle, then saw the warrior running off with it. Pulling a pistol from his belt, he started after the man. Joseph and Reuben came running up to Lewis and raised their rifles to fire at the Indian. The warrior, realizing that he had bitten off way more than he could chew, dropped Lewis's rifle and moved slowly away. Drouillard ran up to kill the Indian, but Lewis ordered him not to shoot.

The other warriors had in the meantime begun to drive off the explorers' horses. The Fields and Drouillard ran after them while Lewis, armed with his pistol, chased two Indians who were driving off one of his horses. After a pursuit of some three hundred yards one of the Indians turned to face Lewis, who fired his pistol, hitting the Indian in the abdomen. He fell to the ground, but was able to fire his own gun, barely missing Lewis. Having no ammunition to reload his pistol, Lewis returned to the camp, where he and Drouillard packed their own baggage and burned the Indians' possessions.

In the meantime the Field brothers had followed the Indians until they had dispersed, two swimming the river to escape, the others fleeing on horseback. The brothers returned to camp with several horses. Lewis and his men loaded their gear and started on the long ride toward the Missouri River. Prudence dictated that they quickly get themselves as far away as possible from possible reprisals. They rode all day and into the night, traveling a hundred miles before they stopped at 2am the next morning to rest. As they neared the river later that day they were overjoyed to first hear several gunshots and then to see their friends coming down the river in the boats. The horses that had carried them to safety were honorably discharged and the current of the Missouri engaged.<sup>20</sup>

It was the only Indian fight of the Expedition. Its consequences are still debated. If the warriors were indeed Blackfoot, this incident is cited as the



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The fishing weir *sihi nei-coade* was significant to the traditional life-way of the Lemhi Shoshone. It was constructed of willow bark and other natural material. The fish weirs were placed strategically along low creek bottoms to entrap native fish, including salmon, steelhead and trout.

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cause of the deadly enmity displayed by the Blackfeet toward Americans trappers during the early 1800s. The Blackfeet, by this theory, sought revenge for the two men slain by Lewis and Reuben Field and effectively prevented Americans from following the route Lewis and Clark had taken to reach the Lemhi Shoshone. But there is also evidence it was John Colter's fighting the Blackfeet alongside the Crow and Salish warriors that created bad blood between the Blackfeet and Americans. There was nothing wrong with Lewis and his men fighting to prevent the theft of their guns and horses. Any warrior would do that. The Blackfeet had gambled and lost. But there was no justifiable cause for John Colter to be in that battle.<sup>21</sup> If we take Lewis at his word that the eight men were Atsinas, those theories need another look.

It's easy to imagine Joseph and Reuben Field as part of the first generation of fur trappers who returned to the mountains after the Expedition. But Joseph was dead by October 1807 of a cause that has not come to light. Reuben Field married Mary Myrtle in 1808 and died in 1823<sup>22</sup> Lewis was not liberal in his praise of the men of the Corps of Discovery. Few merited special notice. But it was the fate of Joseph and Reuben Field, Lewis wrote, "to have been engaged in the most dangerous and difficult scenes of the voyage, in which they uniformly acquitted themselves with honor."<sup>23</sup>





Thomas W. Nighan



# 12

## Miscellaneous Specialists: Shields, Thompson, Windsor, and Goodrich



*On August 8, 1805, Meriwether Lewis, George Drouillard, Hugh McNeal, and John Shields contemplate a discouraging site from the Continental Divide: more mountains.*

It seems odd to include **Private John Shields** among the "young men from Kentucky," though he certainly joined the Expedition with them. At age thirty-five, John Shields was the oldest soldier of the permanent party. He was born in 1769 to Robert and Nancy Stockton Shields near Harrison, Virginia, the sixth of ten sons and distant kin to

Daniel Boone. In 1784 the Shields family moved to Pidgeon Forge in the Smoky Mountains of Tennessee. As a teenager John learned the blacksmith trade and went to work for his only sister's husband. When he was about twenty-one, he married a woman named Nancy. They had one daughter, Janette.<sup>1</sup>



Lewis preferred unmarried men, but Shields proved to be some of the most valuable additions to the Corps of Discovery. But, like the other Kentuckians, Shields was an independent man who made his own rules and consequently found that army life took some getting used to. Reuben Fields, John Colter, and John Shields all got into trouble for insubordination during the 1803–4 winter at Camp Wood, Illinois. When Reuben Fields refused to serve guard duty in early March, Shields, "excited disorder and faction." That sounds like something a "barracks lawyer" would say, trying to stir up trouble for fun. But that wasn't the case.<sup>2</sup> Several weeks later Shields was punished for threatening the life of Sgt. John Ordway, who was often left in command when the officers were absent. But Shields asked for and received forgiveness from the officers for his transgressions. Lewis and Clark wanted this man with them.<sup>3</sup>

It was John Shields' talent as a gunsmith that was perhaps his most significant contribution to the Lewis and Clark Expedition. No equipment was more important to the Corps of Discovery than its firearms. Meat was the staff of life, hunting a constant activity. The hard use, exposure to weather, the packing and unpacking all conspired against a firearm's continued operation. The Corps blacksmiths, Willard and Shields, kept them in good order. In the spring of 1806 Shields re-bored one of Clark's rifles and, in Clark's words, "brought hir to shoot very well."<sup>4</sup> During the winter of 1804–5 among the Mandans on the

Missouri and the winter of 1805–6 with the Clatsops in Oregon, Shields fashioned from scraps of metal tools and weapons that were traded to the Indians for food.<sup>5</sup> By the end of the Clatsop winter, spare parts for the guns were becoming scarce. Shields had the talent to fashion parts correctly from metal scraps. Perhaps Lewis best summarized Shields' contributions in his journal entry of June 10, 1805. "We have been much indebted," wrote Lewis, "to the ingenuity of this man on many occasions...he makes his own tools principally and works extremely well in either wood or metal, and in this way has been extremely serviceable to us, as well as being a good hunter and an excellent water-man."<sup>6</sup>

Shields was also an excellent woodsman, Lewis could have added. He was with Clark's advance party when the starving Corps tumbled off the western end of the Lolo Trail in September 1805. With Clark again on the return trip in 1806, Shields found the path that the Salish tribe used to cross the continental divide from the East Fork of the Bitterroot River into the Big Hole. The discovery of this route prevented the party from having to repeat the hellish crossing of Lost Trail Pass.<sup>7</sup>

But Shields was not perfect. On August 10th, 1805, Shields was a member of the advance party with Lewis who had set out on foot in search of the Lemhi Shoshone after Sacagawea had assured them they were nearing her homeland. To cover more ground, Lewis had sent Shields and George Drouillard some distance out to either side of his line of

march with orders to signal to him if they came upon any signs of a trail. When Lewis spied a mounted Indian two miles ahead, his party walked on toward the warrior, maintaining their dispersed formation. As they approached to within a few hundred yards of the Indian, Lewis signaled to Drouillard and Shields to halt their advance. Drouillard came to a stop. Shields failed to see the signal, however, and continued on until the Indian turned his horse around and rode off. Recalling Shields to him, Lewis "could not forbare abraiding [him] a little."<sup>8</sup>

But that episode was not foremost in Lewis's mind when he wrote to Secretary of War Henry Dearborn in 1807 that "nothing was more peculiarly useful to us, in various situations, than...his man...in repairing our guns, accountments, &c...."<sup>9</sup> Following the Expedition, Shields returned to his wife Nancy and trapped in Missouri with Daniel Boone and in Indiana with Squire Boone. In 1809 he died and was buried near Corydon, Indiana.<sup>10</sup> The obscurity of his final passage in this life must not allow us to forget that John Shields was one of a small group of men whose presence was essential to the success of the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

**Private John Thompson**, one of Expedition's cooks, was another man who seems almost missing from the journals. Casual readers may at times be puzzled by the lack of personal detail in the journals. To be honest, historians also yearn for more passages that reveal something of the inter-personal dynamics within the Corps of





Discovery. Of course, you remind yourself, this was a scientific and military expedition and they wrote *journals*, not *diaries*. And, to be fair, a personal touch does find a place here and there. Perhaps the best known is Lewis's remarkably candid 32nd birthday journal entry of August 18, 1805, in which he expresses regret for the amount of time he has wasted in his life and proclaims a determination to live henceforth for mankind rather than for himself. Such passages are too few and too far between.<sup>11</sup>

Considerable work is often necessary also to ferret out details that provide us an understanding of what everyday life was like in the Corps of Discovery. Cooking is a good example. There's information galore about what went into the pot and who was responsible for killing it, but relatively little about how it was cooked or who did it. Food preparation was the duty of one private

in each of the three squads or "messes" of the Corps. Apparently some difficulties arose in the distribution of provisions during that first summer of 1804. On July 8 Lewis issued orders appointing John Thompson, William Werner, and John Collins "Superintendents of Provision" with the responsibilities of:

- seeing to it that there was as little waste as possible,
- cooking "in such manner as is most wholesome,"
- exercising their own judgment "in their mode of cooking,"
- determining what portion of the available provisions would be consumed at each meal,
- accounting for all the cooking utensils of their mess.<sup>12</sup>

In return, the "Superintendents of Provisions" were exempt from guard duty, pitching tents, and collecting firewood. Lewis assigned Private John Thompson to the position of provision superintendent for Sgt. Charles Floyd's [later Patrick Gass's] squad. Little is known of Thompson's background. He may have been a surveyor in Indiana before joining the Corps. If so, he may have also been a useful assistant to Clark. There was also a Private John Thompson in Captain Amos Stoddard's company book who was discharged on February 19, 1804.<sup>13</sup> This could be our man.

On October 8, 1805, the dugout canoe in which Thompson was riding split on one side and sank in a rapid on the lower Clearwater River. Thompson was "a little hurt;" no other details were recorded. Although the men managed to recover the boat, everything in it was wet. It was all unpacked and spread out onshore to dry.<sup>14</sup> During the Ft. Clatsop winter of 1805–6, Thompson went out hunting several times. On the return trip up the Columbia in the spring of 1806, he caught an Indian trying to steal an axe. Thompson jerked it out of the native's hands before he could escape with it.<sup>15</sup> And in July 1806 Thompson helped privates Hugh McNeal and Silas Goodrich raise the cache at the Great Falls portage.<sup>16</sup> Clark's note in the late 1820s that Thompson had been killed.<sup>17</sup> **Private Richard Windsor** was one of the hunters who were kept busy meeting the nutrition and calorie requirements of over thirty men and one woman who performed labors few of us can even



imagine. Cordelling a boat up the Missouri or climbing the steep ridges of the Lolo Trail could easily cost a person 5,000–6,000 calories a day and more. At that rate a man would need about eight to ten pounds of, say, venison every day. Multiple that by thirty+ and you have a better understanding of why the members of the Corps took such an interest in the skill of their hunters.<sup>18</sup>

By the time the Corps reached "Decision Point" at the mouth of the Marias River in Montana, they had entered a big game paradise. Getting enough to eat was easy. Figuring out which river to take took some effort. On the morning of June 6, 1805, Captain Meriwether Lewis concluded that the Marias River was not the true Missouri River. For two days he had walked up the Marias from the confluence of the two rivers. The Marias, he concluded, "had its direction too much to the North for our rout to the Pacific."<sup>19</sup> The small reconnaissance party he led broke camp and prepared to hike back down to the Missouri to rejoin Captain William Clark and the main body of the Corps of Discovery. Early that morning he had sent Sgt. Nathaniel Pryor and Private Richard Windsor up the Marias with orders to climb "some commanding eminence and take it's [sic] bearing as far as possible."<sup>20</sup>

In the meantime Lewis had his little band of soldiers and boatmen lash together two crude log rafts for what they hoped would be a slick descent of the Marias. The chance to go down a river with the current if only for a few miles was too sweet an opportunity to ignore. But it soon became clear to

Lewis that "this mode of transportation was hazerdous." They abandoned the rafts, shouldered their gear, and set off on foot. That afternoon a storm blew in from the northeast, soaking and chilling the party as they hiked across the plain. It was still raining when darkness fell. Because they had brought no shelter of any kind but a wool blanket or buffalo robe, Lewis wrote in his journal, "an uncomfortable nights rest is a natural consequence."<sup>21</sup>

"As I expected," Lewis wrote the next morning, "we had a most disagreeable and wrestless night." They continued their march. The clay-like soil was too slick when wet to permit the explorers to walk safely on any slope. Lewis learned this the hard way when he slipped on the face of a bluff. But with his spear-like espartoon he was able to arrest his slide. Had he failed, he would have been "precipitated into the river from a craggy pricipice of about ninety feet." Lewis had barely recovered his footing when he heard Private Windsor "cry out, 'god god Capt. what shall I do[?]'"<sup>22</sup>

Lewis turned and saw that Windsor was lying on his stomach "with his wright hand arm and leg over the precipice while he was holding on with the left arm and foot." Disguising his considerable alarm, Lewis in a calm voice told Windsor to take his knife out of its sheath with his right hand and carefully carve a hole on the slope for his dangling right foot. Windsor did so and with the slight purchase he gained he was able to raise himself to his knees. One at a time Windsor carefully took

off his "mockersons" and toe-grip by hand-grab slowly crawled away from the cliff and to safety.<sup>23</sup>

Once again a member of the Corps had narrowly escaped disaster. And once again a vivid episode briefly illuminates the life of an otherwise shadowy figure in American history. Of Richard Windsor's origins we know only that he may have been a member of Captain Russell Bissell's company of the 1st U.S. Infantry stationed at Fort Kaskaskia, Illinois, where he was recruited for the Expedition.<sup>24</sup>

Windsor was not just a hunter. He was one of the best, according to Sgt. John Ordway. In Early April 1806 the Corps was homeward bound up the Columbia River. Near present day Portland, Oregon, they found a healthy population of deer and elk and decided to lay in a supply of jerky before going on. "So all the best of our hunters are turned out," Ordway wrote on April 6, including Windsor.<sup>25</sup>

But Windsor makes very few other appearances in the journals of the Expedition beyond hunting and other routine activities. He seems to have enjoyed reasonably good health on the Expedition. In the Salmon River Valley in August 1805, Windsor was a member of Clark's Salmon River reconnaissance detachment. Windsor fell ill, delaying for a day or two Clark's return to the Lemhi valley and reunion with Lewis.<sup>26</sup> On the return trip in 1806, Windsor was with Pryor near the Yellowstone River when Crow Indians stole the Expedition's entire horse herd.<sup>27</sup>



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Following the return of the Corps to St. Louis, we don't know much about what happened to Private Richard Windsor. In the late 1820s Clark believed he was living on the Sangamon River in Illinois.<sup>28</sup>

If the Lewis and Clark Expedition was for some members of the Corps of Discovery the best imaginable hunting trip, it was for **Private Silas Goodrich** of Massachusetts the fishing trip of a lifetime. Most of the Corps' route followed two great river systems, the Missouri and the Columbia. The salmon runs of the Columbia basin supported a numerous and diverse population of Indian tribes from the Pacific Ocean upstream to the headwaters of the Salmon River. The tribes along the Missouri, however, relied more upon hunting and farming. It was upon the relatively unschooled pisces of the Missouri River basin that the Corps's Izaak Walton practiced his craft.

The limited amount of angling gear on Captain Meriwether Lewis's pre-expedition supply list suggests that he didn't foresee fishing as crucial to the Corps' survival but rather perhaps as a means of varying the Corps' diet or as an opportunity for a pleasant diversion. Lewis's supplier was the "Old Experienced Tackle Shop" kept by George Lawson at 18 Dock Street, Philadelphia. At a cost of \$25.37, Lewis acquired 125 hooks, several dozen assorted fish lines, a "Sportsman Flask," and an "eight stave" reel. He also bought hooks and lines as gifts for Indians.<sup>29</sup>

The journals of the Expedition don't

have much to say about fishing methods or the baits that were used. There's no mention of a rod. After baiting his hook, Goodrich probably pulled as much line as he thought he needed from the reel and threw it out into the river. Perhaps in smaller streams he tied an appropriate length of line to a green willow branch. There is considerable discussion in the journals, particularly Lewis's, of the different fish species caught by Goodrich. On the lower Missouri, Goodrich hauled in huge catfish, some of them weighing more than 100 lbs.<sup>30</sup> Further up the river in 1805, species previously unknown to Euro-Americans, including the goldeye, began to appear on Goodrich's hooks.<sup>31</sup>

In June 1805, Silas Goodrich was the sole human witness to one of the supreme moments of Meriwether Lewis's life. Lewis's scout up the Marias River having convinced him that it was not the Missouri, he led a small detachment up the Missouri to locate the series of thundering waterfalls that Indians at Ft. Mandan had told him he would find on the river.

On the morning of June 13, Lewis sent George Gibson, Joseph Field, and George Drouillard out to hunt. Accompanied by Goodrich, Lewis proceeded on up the river, which ran through a canyon two hundred feet below the level of the broad plain. They soon saw several miles ahead what at first appeared to be plumes of white smoke swirling out of the canyon. As they drew nearer, they could hear the distinctive bass rumble of a large waterfall.

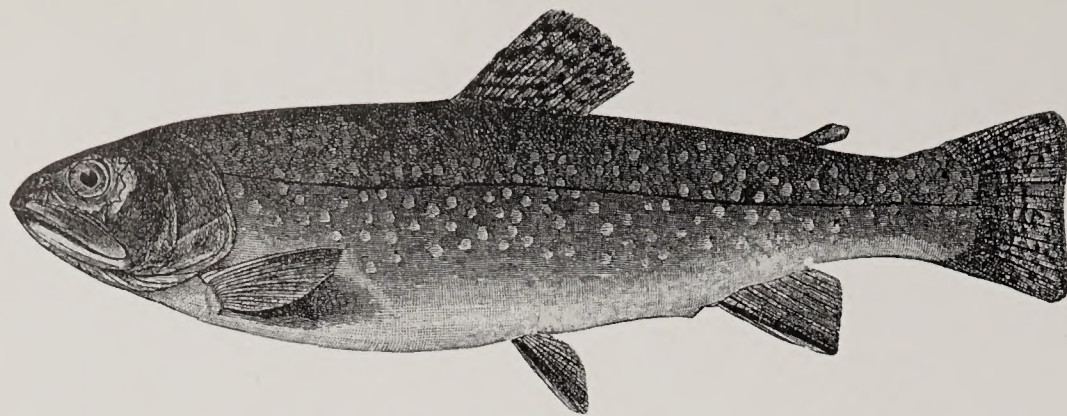
The sound increased as they walked for two hours toward its source, a cauldron of flying spray and incredible roaring that suddenly appeared below them. A cataract eighty feet high spanned the entire width of the mighty Missouri. It was, Lewis thought, "the grandest sight I ever beheld." He scrambled down the canyon wall with Goodrich to contemplate from its very foot the Great Falls of the Missouri.

Lewis sat transfixed for hours. Sooner or later, Goodrich unpacked his fishing gear, and began to catch two and three-pound trout of a new species characterized, Lewis wrote in his journal, by "a small dash of red on each side of the first ventral fins...the flesh is of...a rose red." Today we know it as *oncorhynchus clarki lewisi*, the cut-throat trout.<sup>32</sup>

The fishing was so good that Lewis decided to try it himself. On June 15 he wrote in his journal: "I amused myself in fishing.... I caught a number of very fine trout which I made Goodrich dry; Goodrich also caught about two dozen..." The two men, officer and private, shared a brief vacation from the labors of the Expedition. Their discovery of the Great Falls was the affirmation Lewis had sought that the Corps of Discovery was proceeding up the true Missouri River. And Silas Goodrich, the Expedition's angler, had discovered a new species of trout.<sup>33</sup>

Lewis next recorded Goodrich's fishing at Camp Fortunate on the forks of the Beaverhead River. By this point, the buffalo herds were behind them: game





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was scarce. The trout Goodrich caught were welcome additions to the menu. Lewis felt responsible for feeding the Lemhi Shoshone in camp. The demand for food was so great that Lewis had the men build a "bush drag" which they used to seine over five hundred fish.<sup>34</sup>

Unfortunately, Silas Goodrich caught more than fish on the Expedition. During the 1805–6 winter at Ft. Clatsop in present Oregon, Sgt. Patrick Gass noted in his journal that "An old Chinook squaw frequently visited our quarters with nine girls which she kept as prostitutes.... The women are much inclined to venery, and like those on the Missouri are sold to prostitution at an easy rate."<sup>35</sup> William Clark complained that the Chinook women were "lude and sport publicly."<sup>36</sup> Goodrich apparently contracted syphilis early in the winter. Lewis's journal entry for January 27 states that "Goodrich has recovered from the Louis Veneri which he contracted from an amorous contact with a Chinook damsel.... I cured him by the use of mercury."<sup>37</sup>

The standard treatment for syphilis at that time was mercury, either in pill form or as a salve that was applied to the skin lesions that were the early symptoms of infection. Lewis had packed two pounds of the salve in his medical supplies. The standard course of treatment was to continue the mercury until the patient developed sore gums and began to salivate excessively. The treatment was discontinued until these side-effects ceased. Then the mercury was applied again. This was repeated until the lesions healed.<sup>38</sup>

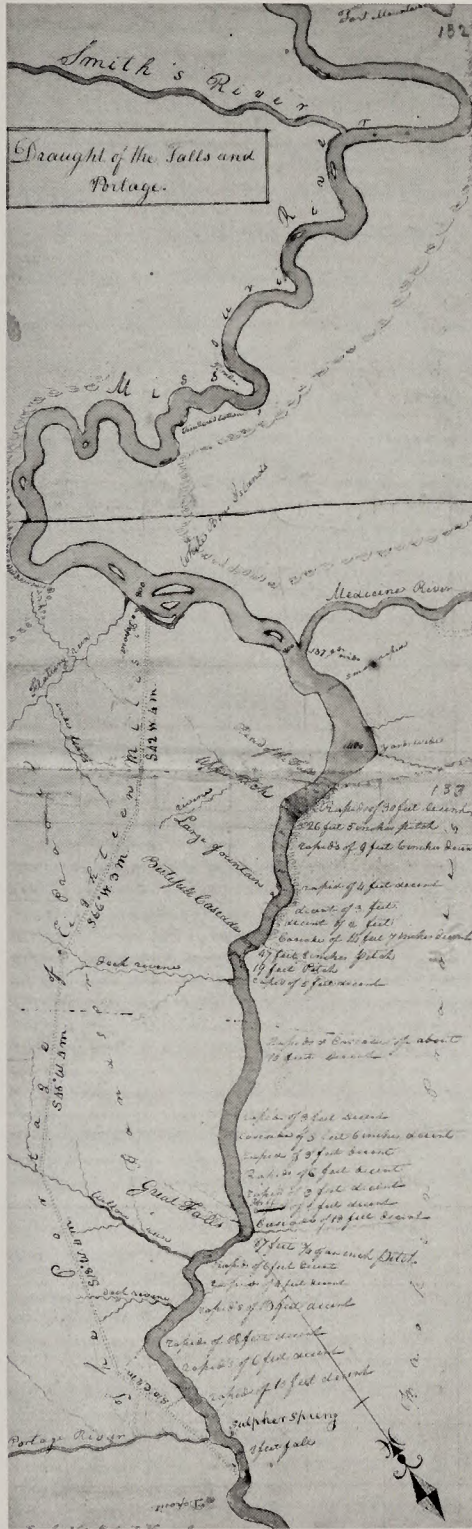
Lewis on March 8, 1806, reported again that Goodrich had "recovered" from the disease and was ordered to belay the mercury treatment.

When the Corps reached Travelers' Rest at present Lolo, Montana, on the return trip in July 1806, Goodrich was suffering the symptoms of the second stage of syphilis: skin lesions, fever, headache, and fatigue. Once again, the symptoms subsided.<sup>39</sup> From Travelers' Rest, Goodrich was assigned to the party detailed to raise the cache at the Great Falls. Once again Goodrich took pleasure in casting out a baited hook into the river among the black-spotted, red-gilled trout he had discovered the year before.

Following the return to St. Louis, Silas Goodrich may have remained in the army. The only known post-expedition record is Clark's notation that Goodrich was dead by the year 1825. Of syphilis? It's impossible to say. There is a more fitting legacy for Silas Goodrich: the image of a fisherman at the foot of an untamed falls in an uncivilized Eden, the sole companion of our nation's greatest explorer.<sup>40</sup>



## 13

George Shannon:  
The Kid Brother

Clark's map of the portage route around the Great Falls of the Missouri. George Shannon became separated from his hunting companions at the Great Falls but resolutely continued to perform his duty.

Lewis and Clark enthusiasts tend to have a great deal of affection for **Private George Shannon**. He was the "kid brother," at eighteen the youngest member of the permanent party in 1803. He's best known for getting lost a few times, but his contributions to the Expedition were considerable. Shannon eventually became a frequent and successful hunter and a scout entrusted with the same kinds of independent missions assigned Joseph and Reuben Fields. Shannon and John Colter were the first two members of the Corps of Discovery, selected by Meriwether Lewis in 1803.<sup>1</sup> Shannon is no known to have kept a journal on the Expedition, but if he had, here's how one entry might have read:

August 26, 1804. "We discovered upon arising that the horses had strayed during the night. Captain Clark sent me to track them. I found them by mid-afternoon and returned to a point on the river. Moccasin prints I found on a sandbar indicated the party had already passed, so I proceeded on up the river. I still had not caught up with the boats by nightfall, so I made camp and determined to continue upriver at first light. For supper I roasted a duck and ate several wild plums. I have seen no sign the 'little people' the Indians informed us inhabit a hill near here."

For the Corps of Discovery late August 1805 was a time of trouble and tragedy. On the 18th, the deserter Moses Reed was court-martialed, flogged, and dishonorably discharged from the permanent party.<sup>2</sup> And on the 20th, Sergeant Charles Floyd died of what may have

been a ruptured appendix.<sup>3</sup>

And now, six days later, Shannon and the horses used by the hunters to pack meat were lost.<sup>4</sup> George Drouillard, possibly the Corps' best tracker, failed to find any sign of Shannon or the horses on the 27th.<sup>5</sup> Joseph Fields and John Shields had better luck the next day. But the prints they found were headed upriver. Shannon was lost, all right, and moving farther away from the main party with every step. [The prints that had deceived Shannon were most likely made by Indians.] With luck, he would realize his mistake, make camp, and wait for the boats to come up. But a week went by and there was still no sign of Shannon. "This man not being a first rate hunter," Clark wrote in his journal on September 3rd, "we deturmined [sic] to send [John Colter] in pursuit of him with some Provisions."<sup>6</sup> But Colter couldn't find Shannon, either.<sup>7</sup>

A week later, on the morning of September 11, a man was observed riding horseback toward the boats. It was Shannon, alive but weak from hunger. He had used up his small supply of lead rifle balls within the first few days of his ordeal. With the exception of a rabbit he had somehow managed to kill with a stick fired from his rifle, Shannon had been living on wild grapes and plums. After two weeks Shannon finally decided he could never overtake the Expedition. His next best chance, he figured, was to set up camp on the river and hope to catch a ride back down the river on a fur trader's boat, a long shot at best.



Inadvertently, Shannon had made the right decision.<sup>8</sup>

Shannon was born in Pennsylvania in 1785, a descendant of Irish colonists. He had just turned eighteen when he joined the Lewis and Clark Expedition in 1803. He and John Colter were taken onboard the keelboat by Captain Meriwether Lewis either in Pittsburgh or at another point downstream. They may have been the two un-named men Lewis described in his journal as being "on trial" as potential members of the expedition.<sup>9</sup>

Several of the Kentuckians got off to a bad start during the winter of 1803–4 at Camp Wood, but not Shannon. The two most common offenses were extra-curricular alcohol consumption and insubordination. John Colter was guilty of both; Shannon of neither. In fact, when Sgt. Nathaniel Pryor was taken ill in early April 1804, Shannon was given temporary command of Pryor's squad.<sup>10</sup> That act and the increasing frequency with which the officers gave Shannon important assignments balance his historical account book; he was much more than comic relief.

But Shannon came by his reputation for unintentional absences honestly. During the Great Falls portage on June 19th, 1805, Shannon, George Drouillard, and Reuben Field were sent up the Sun River to hunt. At noon Shannon separated from the other two. That was the last they saw of him. They reported to Clark that Shannon was lost again. But on the 23rd Lewis found Shannon some five miles up the Sun

River hunting and drying meat "as he had been directed."<sup>12</sup>

The only other time Shannon was "lost" was in early August 1805, when the Corps was ascending the Jefferson River in present-day Montana. Because Sacagawea had assured the officers that they were nearing her tribe's homeland, Lewis, George Drouillard, Toussaint Charbonneau, and Sgt. Patrick Gass had gone ahead of the boats on foot to search for the Lemhi Shoshone. When Lewis reached the confluence of the Big Hole and Beaverhead rivers, he determined that the Beaverhead was the correct fork to follow. He wrote a note to Clark informing him of his choice and left it on a stick at the forks.<sup>13</sup> By the time Clark reached the confluence several days later, the note and stick were gone, probably carried off by some meddlesome beaver.

When Clark reached the confluence, he was on his own. He turned the boats up the Big Hole River. They soon found that it was divided into several channels and choked with willows through which they were forced to cut a passage. After a mile of "excessive labours," they camped on an island.<sup>14</sup> Lewis's party returned to the forks early the following day to discover Clark had gone up the wrong river. They found Clark and informed him of his mistake. The Beaverhead was marginally navigable in comparison to the Big Hole. The canoes would have to be floated back down to the confluence.<sup>15</sup>

But Shannon had been sent out to hunt that morning up the Big Hole.

Drouillard was sent to fetch him back, but returned in the evening by himself. They blew the bugle and fired off several shots to no avail. "I am fearful he is lost again," Lewis confided to his journal.<sup>16</sup> Shannon had logically assumed that the boats would continue up the Big Hole. On the next day, the 7th, Lewis sent Reuben Fields up the river after Shannon. Early that afternoon the Corps returned to the confluence and started up the Beaverhead. Reuben Fields returned at noon the next day without Shannon, even though he'd been up the Big Hole quite a few miles.<sup>17</sup>

Shannon finally showed up at breakfast on August 9th. This time the prodigal son got himself out of trouble. His hunt had taken him away from the river. He returned to the Big Hole on the 7th, only to find no one at the place he had left the party. As he had the year before on the Missouri, Shannon assumed that the Corps had gotten ahead of him up the Big Hole. He hiked up the river the rest of the day, studied it, and reached the conclusion that since it was un-navigable, the Corps could not be above him and must have gone down the river and taken the other fork. But he had learned a great deal since the year before. When Shannon returned, he brought with him the skins of three deer he had killed. "[Shannon] had lived very plentifully this trip," Lewis wrote.<sup>18</sup>

One further adventure awaited Shannon on the return trip in 1806. When Clark's party halted in late July to construct dugouts for their descent of the Yellowstone River, Sgt. Nathaniel



Following the Expedition,  
Shannon helped Nicholas Biddle  
edit the Lewis and Clark jour-  
nals.

Pryor, Shannon, and two other privates were ordered to drive the horses overland to the Mandan villages. Two days after leaving Clark, Pryor and his men awoke to find that Indians had stolen all the horses. They backpacked their baggage to the river and made two Indian "bull-boats." Bobbing along, they caught up with Clark in about a week.<sup>19</sup>

Shannon remained in the army after the expedition, and in 1807 was once again a member of a party commanded by Pryor, who had been promoted to the rank of ensign. When Lewis and Clark visited the Mandans on the return voyage in 1806, the chief known as Sheheke or "Big White" accepted their invitation to travel with them to Washington, D.C.<sup>20</sup> Pryor's task in 1807 was to return the chief and his family to his village. But the Arikaras, who were often in conflict with the Mandans, refused to let them pass and a fight broke out. Several men were killed and Shannon was badly wounded in one leg. Pryor was forced to return to St. Louis. Shannon's wound developed gangrene and it became necessary to amputate his leg above the knee. Shannon was close to death both before and after the surgery.<sup>21</sup> In 1813 Congress granted Shannon a pension of \$8 a month as compensation; it was raised to \$12 in 1817.<sup>22</sup>

From 1808 to 1810 Shannon studied law in Lexington, Kentucky.<sup>23</sup> After Lewis's death it became Clark's responsibility to see to the publication of the journals he and Lewis had kept on the expedition. In Philadelphia in the spring of 1810 Clark secured the ser-

The spirits of the men were now much elevated at the prospect of getting horses. — 128  
Courses and Distances traveled by Capt. Clark  
August 17<sup>th</sup> 1808  
S 30° W. 4. to a high knob on hills in the forks of Jefferson's River, the same being 10 M. by water, the river making a considerable bend to the stat. the forks of this river is the most distant point to which the waters of the Mississippi are navigable. of course we  
Miles 4 laid up our canoes at this place and commenced our voyage by land. —

VICES of Nicholas Biddle for the monumental task of editing and preparing the journals for publication.<sup>24</sup> On his way west to St. Louis, Clark visited Shannon in Kentucky. Clark either asked or Shannon volunteered to travel to Philadelphia and help Biddle with the editing. On May 22 Clark wrote to Biddle from Louisville:

*This [letter] will be handed to you by Mr. George Shannon...who was with me on the N.W. expedition; he has agreed to...give such information relative [sic] to that tour as may be in his power. This young man possesses a sincere and undisguised heart...he is highly spoken of by all his acquaintance and much respected at the Lexington University where he has been for the last two years.<sup>25</sup>*

Shannon spent at least a year helping Biddle with the journals. The value of his contribution to the work is suggested in letters Biddle wrote to Clark. In a letter dated June 28, 1811, Biddle wrote, "I have received much assistance from that gentleman [,] who is very intelligent and sensible and whom it was worth your while to send here."<sup>26</sup> While Shannon was still in Philadelphia, Clark invited him to join in a trading partnership. Shannon declined the offer and continued his studies in law.<sup>27</sup>

He had returned to Lexington by 1813. In that year he married Ruth Snowden

Price. Shannon established a law practice and took an interest in politics. In 1820 and again in 1822 he was elected to a seat in the Kentucky House of Representatives. The Shannons later moved to Missouri, where he remained active in politics, serving in the Missouri Senate. In 1836 George Shannon died in court at Palmyra, Missouri, at age forty-nine.<sup>28</sup> No member of the Corps of Discovery served the Expedition longer or more faithfully than George Shannon. From the launching of the keelboat in 1803 through the editing of the journals in 1811, George Shannon was present.







# 14

## Sergeants Gass, Pryor, and Ordway



Sgt. Patrick Gass, in this drawing squaring a log with an adze, was the Corps of Discovery's head carpenter.

As far as the soldiers of the Corps of Discovery knew, their commanders were two Army captains. Lewis, as noted earlier, insisted that the men believe that Clark was his equal in rank even after he learned that the Department of War had decided that was not to be the case. Normally a captain commands a company, which at the time of the Expedition could be

anywhere from fifty up to a hundred men. The size of the permanent party was more like a platoon: twenty-three privates and three sergeants or "non-commissioned" officers. The privates were distributed among three "messes," or squads, each commanded by a sergeant. Only one of the sergeants had already reached that rank before the Expedition: John Ordway. Charles Floyd



and Nathaniel Pryor were new to the Army and two of the young Kentuckians, but Lewis and Clark appointed them as sergeants.

#### **Sergeant Patrick Gass**

Sgt. Floyd's death made it necessary to promote one of the privates to take his place. In an unusually democratic gesture Clark and Lewis had the men vote on August 22. George Gibson and William Bratton received a few votes but Patrick Gass was the overwhelming favorite with nineteen votes. The officers ratified the vote on August 26. As Lewis wrote in the Corps' orderly book:

"The commanding officers have every reason to hope from the previous faithful service of Sergt. Gass, that this expression of their approbation will be still further confirmed by his vigilant attention in future to his duties as Sergeant. the Commanding officers are still further confirmed in the high opinion they had previously formed of the capacity, diligence and integrity of Sergt. Gass."<sup>1</sup>

Patrick Gass was born in Pennsylvania in 1771, making him one of the older members of the Corps. He joined the militia when he was twenty-one, but he left to travel and eventually became apprenticed to a carpenter. He was practicing the trade in 1799 when he enlisted in the 10th Pennsylvania Regulars when war with France seemed imminent. But peace prevailed and Gass was discharged in 1800. He then joined the U.S. Army and was posted to Harper's Ferry and Pittsburgh. By 1802

he was a member of Captain Russell Bissell's company of the 1st U.S. Infantry at Kaskaskia, Illinois.

It was there that he joined the Corps of Discovery as Lewis and Clark stopped on their way up the Mississippi river in the fall of 1803. Bissell, the story goes, was reluctant to lose a skilled carpenter and a good soldier, but Lewis interceded in Gass's behalf. There was a place for a good carpenter in the Corps of Discovery, as well. Gass would eventually help supervise the work on all three forts the Corps constructed for winter quarters.<sup>2</sup>

Gass was one of three privates known to have kept a journal, so writing was not an additional burden he assumed when he was promoted. Gass also often cast a pioneer's eye upon the landscape through which the Corps traveled. He and the others were aware that very few of their countrymen had even seen the lower Missouri country the Corps traveled through in 1804. Here we have the keen appraisal of the "westerling" American, the frontiersman sizing up the country's potential for farming, for settlement, for civilization:

*May 27th: "This is a very handsome place, a rich soil and pleasant country."*

*May 30th: "Here the soil is good, with cottonwood, sycamore, oak, hickory..."*

*June 8th: "This land here is also good well timbered."*

*June 9th: "This is a beautiful country and the land excellent."*

*June 13th: "This is as handsome a place as I ever saw in an uncultivated state."*

*June 15th: "There is a beautiful Prairie on the south side and the land high. Mulberries are in great abundance almost all along the river."*

*June 18th: "...the land is level and well timbered, with ash sugar tree, black walnut..."*

*June 30th: "...and encamped on the south side, where there were the most signs of game I ever saw."<sup>3</sup>*

As a man, Gass was nothing if not modest. There's not a word, for example, in his journal about his own promotion to Sergeant. He was equally reticent to take credit for his work on Fort Mandan, the Corps' 1804-5 winter quarters on the Missouri River near modern Washburn, North Dakota, although he supervised its construction. Work began on the fort in early November, but severely cold weather delayed its completion until Christmas.

Gass's record of the Corps' second Yuletide celebration isn't quite Dickensian, but is full of good cheer nonetheless. Christmas morning began with the usual "round of small arms" gunfire by the Corps and a breakfast glass of brandy for every man as a Christmas present from Captain Clark. The Corps then raised the flag for the



first time over their newly completed fort. That called for another glass of liquid cheer. One of the rooms was cleared, Cruzatte tuned his fiddle, and the dancing began. And at 10 am?: yes, another glass. Christmas dinner—meat, corn, squash, and beans—was served at 1 pm. At 2:30 pm the dancing resumed and lasted well into the evening. Several guests shared the day: Toussaint Charbonneau and his Indian wives. They did not, by the way, join the dancers, "but took no other part than the amusement of looking on." It was perhaps the first, but certainly not the last time Janey would watch her new friends trip the light fantastic.<sup>4</sup>

On New Year's Day, 1805, and the day after, the members of the Corps of Discovery went up to the Mandan village to dance for the Indians. Gass learned "how the Indians keep their horses during the winter." During the day they foraged outside the village on their own, but at night were brought into the Mandans' large earthen lodges and fed cottonwood twigs, "and in this way are kept in tolerable case."<sup>5</sup> Certain other domestic practices also caught the interest of the explorers. A few days before the Corps set out once more up the Missouri in the spring of 1805, Gass recorded in his journal some observations concerning the "fair sex of the Missouri:... It may be observed generally that chastity is not very highly esteemed by these people, and that the severe and loathsome effects of certain French principles are not uncommon among them..."<sup>6</sup>

In early June 1805, two months after

leaving the Mandan villages, the Corps reached the confluence of the Missouri and Marias Rivers in north-central Montana. Once the Missouri was determined to be the right course and Lewis had located Great Falls, Gass supervised the construction of the carts the Corps required to portage their canoes and baggage around the falls.<sup>7</sup> He then applied his wood working skills to Lewis's ill-fated iron framed boat, the U.S.S. Experiment. The frame itself was not the problem. Thirty-six feet long, four and a half wide, and a little over two feet deep, the hull was designed to be covered with animal hides and strengthened by wood stays, slats, cross pieces, and lining. The country was rich with game, so elk and buffalo hides were available. But straight, sturdy tree branches that could be shaved and split for the interior lining of the boat were not to be had. "Crooked and indifferent" is how Lewis described the wood. Gass, John Shields and others worked on the Experiment from June 26 to July 9. But the seams leaked when the boat was launched and the experiment declared a failure.<sup>8</sup>

When the Corps reached the head of navigation at the forks of the Beaverhead River near present day Dillon, Montana, in mid-August, Gass was a member of the detachment Clark led to assess the Salmon River as to its navigability. The Shoshone chief, Cameahwait, several other Shoshones, and the Charbonneau family accompanied Clark.<sup>9</sup> Gass was struck by the poverty of the Lemhi Shoshone when he reached their village on the Lemhi River on August 20th, particularly in

contrast to the Mandans, who were the last nation the Corps had experienced before finding the Shoshone:

*They are the poorest and most miserable nation I ever beheld; having scarcely anything to subsist on, except berries and a few fish, which they contrive by some means to take. They have a great many fine horses, and nothing more; and on account of these they are much harassed by other nations.*<sup>10</sup>

Clark's party encountered "3 lodges of Indians" at the mouth of the North Fork of the Salmon. Gass observed that small groups "appear to live better... than those who live in large villages." These Shoshones made "bread," a combination of sunflower and lambs quarter seeds and service berries that was dried and pounded into a "loaf."<sup>11</sup> The Salmon River was ruled out, of course, and Clark's detachment returned to the Lemhi River to rejoin Lewis and the rest of the Corps. With almost thirty horses and a mule the Expedition "proceeded on" toward the far distant Pacific Ocean. In December 1805 the carpenter/sergeant for the last time supervised the construction of a fort, this one named Clatsop for one of the local Indian nations. The men cleared ground on the 9th of December, laid a foundation on the 10th, and began the huts on the 11th.

At Ft. Mandan the cold motivated the workers under Gass's leadership; at Clatsop it was also the rain. The log walls went up quickly, but Gass despaired of finding wood that could be



split for roofing the cabins until they tried what was most likely red cedar on the 14th. It "split freely and makes the finest puncheons I have ever seen," Gass reported in his journal.<sup>12</sup> After Fort Clatsop was completed, Gass spent most of the rest of the winter supervising the crew who packed game back to the fort.

On at least three occasions on the trip home Gass plied his craft: repairing canoes for the upstream battle with the Columbia River<sup>13</sup>, making packsaddles for horses, and in portaging the Great Falls by wagon.<sup>14</sup> For several days at the falls, Gass is the only journalist for his detachment. Lewis left on horseback on July 16th with George Drouillard and Reuben and Joseph Fields to examine the Marias River. Gass and a small crew remained at the falls to portage the canoes that a detachment led by Sgt. John Ordway would float down. The boats had been cached at the forks of the Beaverhead the previous summer. When that had been accomplished, their orders were to go downstream and wait for Lewis at the mouth of the Marias River, the "Decision Point" of the upstream voyage of 1805.

Coming upstream in 1805, the Corps had been compelled to manhandle the canoes on their carts over nineteen miles around the falls. At least now they were taking the boats downstream and they had horses to help pull the carts. On July 17th Gass went down to the lower end of the portage, where he found the pirogue and the cache that had been left there in 1805 "all safe." Ordway and his detachment arrived on

the 19th and the labor of the portage began. It took only a week. The combined Gass and Ordway crews canoed down the Missouri to their rendezvous with Lewis at the mouth of the Marias on the 28th.<sup>15</sup>

When Gass returned from the Expedition, he made arrangements with bookseller David McKeehan of Pittsburgh to edit and publish his journal of the Expedition.<sup>16</sup> It is not possible to know exactly how much editing McKeehan did, because Gass's original journal has been lost. Scholars have tended to assume that McKeehan's editing was heavy-handed, transforming the rough entries of a semi-literate frontiersman into readable prose. But Carol Lynn MacGregor, who has published in one volume a richly annotated edition of Gass's journal and an account book Gass kept later in life, believes that much of the journal should be considered Gass's work.

It received considerable interest when it first appeared in 1807 because it was the first Expedition journal published and the thus the first eyewitness account of the most famous exploration in American history. The publication of Gass's journal was a source of considerable consternation and embarrassment to Meriwether Lewis, who sent letters to newspapers disparaging Gass's ability to discuss the scientific aspects of the Expedition.<sup>17</sup> McKeehan's public response to Lewis in defense of his client is a classic of American vituperative journalism.<sup>18</sup> As it turned out, the heavily edited journals of Lewis and Clark were not published until

1814. Until then, you needed to locate an edition of Gass's book if you wanted to read a first-hand account of the Expedition.

There is a gap of several years in the story of Patrick Gass after 1807. A family source indicates that he "was engaged in the lead trade" when the War of 1812 began. Gass re-enlisted in the 1st U.S. Infantry at Nashville, Tennessee. He served at Ft. Massac, Kentucky, in 1813 before being sent to Bellefontaine, Missouri, to assist in the construction of yet another new fort. In the spring of 1814 Gass's unit was ordered to the New York frontier. They traveled up the Ohio to Pittsburgh in boats and marched overland to the Niagara River, arriving only a few hours too late to contribute to General Winfield Scott's victory over the British. At the Battle of Lundy's Lane near Niagara Falls on July 25th, Gass was wounded. Either in this battle or in an accident unrelated to combat Gass lost the site of one eye. He was discharged and in 1815 granted an \$8 dollar monthly pension for total disability. It was not enough money to live on. Gass settled in Wellsburg, [West] Virginia and supplemented his pension by tending a ferry and working in a brewery.<sup>19</sup>

In 1831, when Gass was nearing sixty years of age, he married Maria Hamilton, the daughter of the man who owned the boarding house Gass lived in at the time. Maria was still in her teens. Although their first child died during infancy, Patrick and Maria had six more, three boys and three girls, before Maria died of measles in



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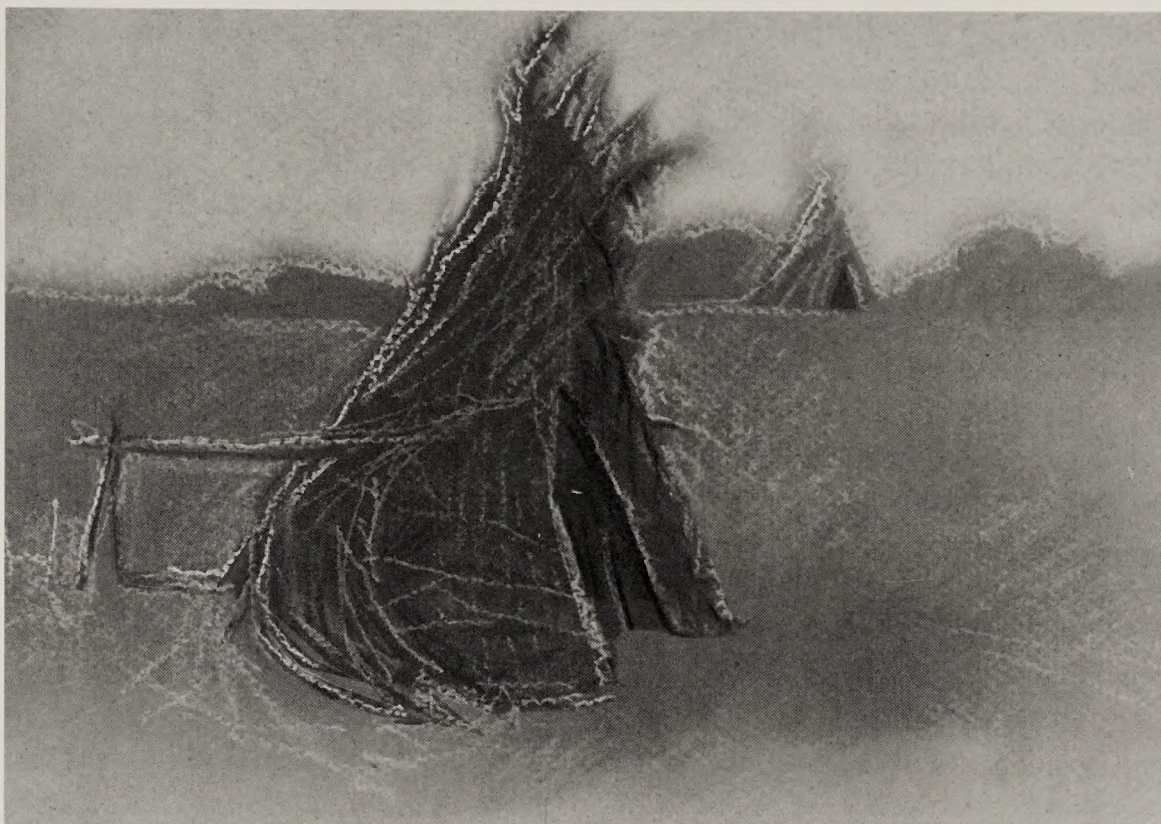
*Below: At a Shoshone fishing camp on the Lemhi River near Salmon, Idaho, Sgt. Patrick Gass learned how the Shoshones made fire and enjoyed their dried, pounded salmon roe soup.*

1847. The youngest child, Rachel, was less than a year old when her mother died. Patrick Gass was seventy-five, old enough to be her great-grandfather.

Unable to raise or adequately support his six children, Gass placed them one by one with local families. By 1850 only seven-year old James still lived with his father. His daughter Annie and her young son had returned to live with and care for Gass by 1860. He died in 1870, at the age of ninety-nine.<sup>20</sup> As far as we know, no other member of the Corps of Discovery lived longer. Only Alexander Willard, who died in 1865, and Jean Baptiste Charbonneau, in 1866, even came close. The first to publish his journal following the Lewis and Clark Expedition and the last surviving member of the Corps of Discovery: enough indeed to secure Patrick Gass a unique place in the hall of fame of American exploration.

### **Sergeant Nathaniel Pryor**

On June 29, 1806, the Lewis and Clark Expedition crossed Lolo Pass and made camp in the meadow below Lolo Hot Springs. Elated at having their second and final crossing of the formidable Lolo Trail behind them, they unsaddled the horses and pitched camp. Then they headed over to the springs for a bath. Captain Lewis found that he could stay no longer than nineteen minutes in the hot water, and even then was affected with a "profuse perspiration." The men all took their turns, though none seem to have imitated their Nez Perce guides, who sporadically left hot springs and dashed into the frigid waters of Lolo Creek and back. To top off a glorious



day, one of the hunters came in with a deer, sparing the Corps of Discovery from a roots-only supper.<sup>21</sup>

Two days later at Travelers' Rest the Captains made their final plans for the trip home. The first priority was a reconnaissance of the Marias and Yellowstone rivers. The Corps would be split. Lewis would lead a detachment across the continental divide directly east to the Great Falls. While some men opened the caches, Lewis and a small party would explore the Marias River on horseback. Clark would proceed directly to the Beaverhead River, there to raise the party's canoes from the beaver ponds in which they had been submerged the year before. Clark would then descend to the Three Forks of the Missouri. One detachment would float down to the Great Falls, pick up Lewis's

two detachments, and continue down the Missouri to an eventual rendezvous with Clark. With the remaining men and the Charbonneau family, Clark would go overland to the upper Yellowstone River, build canoes, and descend the Yellowstone to the Missouri River.<sup>22</sup>

Lewis and Clark also intended that some of the horses would be a diplomatic gift. When Pryor arrived at the Mandans, he was to enquire for Hugh Heney, a British trader Lewis had met during the Mandan winter of 1804-5. Heney had seemed oddly willing to help the Americans in their relations with the Indians. Pryor carried a letter written by Clark to Heney, in which Clark asked the Briton to accompany the Expedition to the Sioux and to convince them to send several chiefs



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with Lewis and Clark to the States for a tour and a meeting with President Jefferson. Sergeant Pryor was to give to Heney any horses that were not traded for supplies.<sup>23</sup>

Nathaniel Pryor was one of the two "young men from Kentucky" to be appointed a sergeant by Lewis and Clark. The other was Charles Floyd, whose death early in the Expedition has been described. Pryor had particular cause to grieve for Floyd; they were cousins. Born in Virginia in 1772, Pryor, like so many other of his Corps friends, moved with his family to Kentucky in 1783. Like the other eight Kentuckians, he jumped aboard the Expedition on the Ohio River in the fall of 1803.<sup>24</sup> Pryor was frequently trusted with positions of responsibility during the Expedition, including presiding over a court-martial, carrying messages to Indian tribes, scouting the lower Marias River in 1805, and leading hunting parties.<sup>25</sup>

He was ill twice, once at Camp Dubois and again at the Great Falls.<sup>26</sup> More serious was the separated shoulder he suffered while lowering the mast of the keelboat at the Mandan villages on November 29, 1804.<sup>27</sup> Clark noted in his journal that it took four attempts to reset the shoulder. Even then, it was done poorly: Pryor re-injured the shoulder several more times before the Expedition returned home and it bothered him off and on the rest of his life. As a sergeant Pryor was required to keep a journal, but it was never published and its whereabouts are a mystery.

Clark's exploration of the Yellowstone

went well until July 18th, when George Gibson injured his leg badly when he fell while trying to mount his horse and was unable to travel without extreme pain. Waiting for the wound to heal enough to permit Gibson to ride was out of the question. Clark decided that the best thing to do would be to stop now and build canoes and descend the Yellowstone, something that they would have done shortly anyway. This would give Gibson a few days of recovery time while the boats were being constructed.<sup>28</sup>

Once Clark had launched the canoes, the horses were no longer needed. Lewis and Clark had devised a plan that would make the horses useful long after they were left behind. First, they reasoned, the horses could be used for trade at the Knife River villages, which supported the largest trading center on the upper Missouri. By this point the Corps' supplies of trade goods and gifts, without which meetings with Indians were a waste of time, and "luxuries" like tobacco were low or non-existent. Clark's orders to Sgt. Nathaniel Pryor, who was placed in charge of the horses, listed the items the Corps needed most: flints, knives, paint [for gifts to Indians], pepper, sugar, coffee or tea, handkerchiefs, tobacco, two kegs of "spirits," and a hat for Sgt. John Ordway.<sup>29</sup>

On the morning of the July 24th, Clark's detachment loaded their new dugouts and headed down the Yellowstone River. Pryor and Privates Shannon and Windsor drove the horse herd down the north side of the river. When they met

Clark again later that day, Pryor asked for more help. The horses, he complained, took off at a gallop whenever they saw buffalo. The Indians from whom the Corps had purchased them had trained their horses well! They were buffalo hunters and they knew it. With no human guidance they would pursue and surround a small herd of buffalo. The only way Pryor would be able to keep up with Clark was to send another man in advance to chase the buffalo out of sight before the horses could see them. Clark added Private Hugh Hall to Pryor's detachment. This suited Hall, a poor swimmer, just fine.<sup>30</sup>

Two days after leaving Clark, Pryor awoke to find that there wasn't a horse in sight. It didn't take long to find the tracks of the Indians [probably Crows] who had run them off. Pryor and his men followed the trail on foot for ten miles before giving up. There would be no horse-trading at the Mandans and no horses for Hugh Heney. Of greater concern was their immediate predicament. Continuing on foot to the Mandan villages would be slow, difficult and dangerous. The only thing to do was to walk the ten miles back to camp, get a night's sleep, pack up what they could carry on their backs, and head to the river. It was just not Pryor's day. While he slept that night, Pryor was bitten through the hand by a wolf. Shannon shot the wolf just as it was about to attack Private Windsor.<sup>31</sup>

After a hard walk over open ground, they reached the Yellowstone River near Pompey's Pillar. There was no time to build a dugout canoe, nor is it likely



they had the necessary tools. Pryor and his party were saved by their memories of Mandan bullboats, bowl-shaped craft made by stretching and sewing hides over a willow frame. The Pryor fleet consisted of two bullboats about seven feet in diameter and sixteen inches deep. Into each went two men and their gear. Thus, an Indian craft designed primarily for use as a ferry and looking for all the world like an inverted umbrella minus the handle spun, bobbed, and floated Sergeant Pryor and his men to a reunion with Clark's party on the Missouri River on August 8.<sup>32</sup>

Nathaniel Pryor's life following the Expedition is well documented. When Lewis and Clark passed through the Mandan villages on their way home, Chief Sheheke accepted their invitation to come with them to meet President Jefferson. Pryor remained in the Army and was commissioned as an ensign.<sup>33</sup> He was assigned the duty of escorting Sheheke and his family back up the Missouri in 1807. Secretary of War Dearborn's orders authorized Pryor to outfit an escort party of up to sixteen soldiers and a sergeant. \$400 was appropriated for gifts for the Mandans. As a further inducement and a means of increasing the size of the party, any trader who would agree to accompany Pryor would be granted a government license to trade with the Arikaras and Mandans. Accordingly, Pryor secured the welcome addition of Auguste Choteau and twenty-two of his engages. Each party traveled in a keelboat.<sup>34</sup>

Pryor anticipated trouble when he

reached the Arikara villages with his Mandan guests. Despite Lewis and Clark's pleas for peace, hostilities between Arikaras and Mandans continued on the middle Missouri. When the boats of Pryor and Choteau approached the first Arikara village, the Indians fired several shots in their direction. An interpreter on board asked the Arikara what their intent was. Come ashore, they answered; we want to give you corn and oil. When the boats landed, several hundred armed Arikara and Sioux warriors met them. Pryor ordered Sheheke and his family into his boat's cabin and placed a strong guard at the door. When he called upon the Arikara chiefs for a council, he learned that Manuel Lisa, a prominent St. Louis merchant whose party had already passed the Arikara on their way up the Missouri, had informed them that Pryor would have Sheheke on his boat.

To no avail, Pryor reminded the Arikaras of the friendship they had shown to Lewis and Clark. The only response was several hundred hostile stares. Pryor then decided to continue on in the boats to the upper villages to meet with their chiefs. The Indians, Pryor wrote in his report of the affair, "followed [on-shore] in a body, using threats and menaces." When they beached the boats at the upper village, Indians seized the cable of Choteau's boat. Fearing the complete loss of his trade goods, Choteau offered to trade half of his cargo with the Arikara. At that point another chief arrived and demanded that the Sheheke be handed over. Pryor refused and the Arikara chief stormed off the boat. The Arikaras

"raised a general whoop," fired their guns at the boats, and took cover in stands of willows some sixty yards from the river.

In reply, Pryor fired a volley from his swivel guns, blunderbusses, and small arms. Outnumbered and outgunned, Pryor and Choteau decided to retreat. The Indians continued to fire at them as they drifted downriver and ceased only when a chief was killed by a shot from the boats. Three of Pryor's men had been badly wounded. One was George Shannon, whose leg would soon have to be amputated to save his life. Choteau fared even worse: three dead, six wounded. Diplomatically and militarily, it was a blow to American prestige. Sheheke would not return home until 1809.<sup>35</sup>

Pryor remained in the Army and was promoted to 2nd Lieutenant in 1808. He resigned in 1810 to enter the Indian trade and to smelt lead up the Mississippi River near present day Dubuque. There he narrowly escaped with his life in January 1812. Winnebago Indians who were angry and seeking revenge for their losses at the Battle of Tippecanoe attacked his home. They killed his oxen and several other men. Pryor escaped while the Indians were pillaging his stores and made his way across the frozen Mississippi River. Pryor re-entered the Army during the War of 1812. He was appointed 1st lieutenant in August 1813 and promoted to captain in October 1814.<sup>36</sup> Following his discharge, he moved to the Arkansas River. He was a partner in mercantile business



and in 1819 was licensed to trade with the Osage nation. He married an Osage woman and had several children with her. In 1827 William Clark, then Superintendent of Indian Affairs in the West, appointed Pryor a sub-agent to the Osage nation, an appropriate gesture to one whose services to his country had been, in Clark's words, "long and faithful." Nathaniel Pryor died in 1831 and is buried in Oklahoma.<sup>37</sup>

#### Sergeant John Ordway

John Ordway was born at Dunbarton, New Hampshire, about the year 1775. It's not known when he entered the Army. When he joined the Corps of Discovery in the autumn of 1803, he was a Sergeant in the 1st Infantry Regiment at Ft. Kaskaskia on the Mississippi River. As the only man selected for the Corps who was already a non-commissioned officer, Ordway was given considerable administrative responsibility, including record keeping and commanding the Corps when Lewis and Clark were absent from camp.<sup>38</sup>

Ordway deserves a good measure of sympathy for the difficulties of his job during the 1803-4 winter at Camp Wood. Some of the men, particularly those new to Army life like the "young men from Kentucky," seem to have regarded Ordway as a classroom of 8th graders view a substitute teacher. Privates John Colter and John Shields, for example, refused to take orders from Ordway and threatened his life. On February 20th Lewis and Clark were preparing to leave the camp for several days. Lewis left written orders that:

*...the party shall consider themselves under the immediate command of Sergt. Ordway, who will be held accountable for the...order of the camp during that period...no man shall absent himself from camp without the knowledge and permission of Sergt. Ordway, other than those who have obtained permission from me to be absent on hunting excursions.*<sup>39</sup>

But while the officers were gone two men refused to stand their watch on guard and several others used their permission to hunt to visit a nearby tavern. When Lewis returned, he expressed his disappointment and once again ordered the men "to obey implicitly the orders of Sergt. Ordway..."<sup>40</sup> There were several more infractions before the Corps started up the Missouri River in May and, of course, additional violations during the summer of 1804. There is no evidence, however, of any lingering resentment in Ordway's Expedition journal, which he began on May 14th, the day the Corps finally set out. In a letter to his parents on April 8, Ordway made no mention of the trouble some of the men had been causing him.

His letter is a rare statement of the excitement Ordway and the others were experiencing as the time for their departure drew near. The letter reflects an appreciation of the Expedition's importance, and of the anticipated rewards upon return:

*I am well, thank God, and in high Spirits. I am now on an expedition to the westward, with Capt. Lewis*

*and Capt. Clark, who are appointed by the President of the united states to go on an expedition through the interior parts of North America. We are to ascend the Missouri River with a boat as far as it is navigable and then to go by land, to the western ocean...*

*This party consists of 25 picked men of the army & country likewise and I am So happy as to be one of the pick'd Men from the army.... We are to Receive a great Reward for this expedition, when we Return. I am to Receive 15 dollars pr. month*

*and at least 400 ackers of first Rate land.... I have received no letters Since Betseys yet...*<sup>41</sup>

Ordway went with Clark in July 1806 when the Corps split into two detachments at Travelers' Rest, Montana, to explore more country as they headed toward home. Clark's detachment headed south up the Bitterroot River and then crossed the continental divide to enter the Big Hole west of present day Wisdom. On the morning of July 7th nine horses were missing. Clark sent Ordway and four privates out to find them. The rest of the detachment would continue south through the Big Hole toward the forks of the Beaverhead. Ordway and Private Francois Labiche found the tracks of the missing horses in "a valley which led in the mountn. towards the Shoshones nation." Labiche and Ordway finally caught up with the horses in the evening and herded them back toward



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the previous night's camp. They hobbled the horses and stayed the night.

They woke to a heavy frost on the morning of the 8th, something not very unusual in the Big Hole in summer. Following the trail taken by the rest of the detachment the day before, they came to present day Jackson Hot Springs. They had seen deer, elk, and pronghorn during their morning ride but had not stopped to kill anything. So it was a pleasant surprise to find that Clark's party had left a piece of boiled venison for them at the springs. Ordway liked the taste of the spring water, but found it "so hot that I cannot hold my hand in a Second of time." They rode on to the south and arrived in Shoshone Cove (present day Horse Prairie) that evening, having come by Ordway's estimate some forty miles. For supper they had nothing to eat but the head of a pronghorn that had apparently been shot and butchered by one of Clark's men.<sup>42</sup>

At noon the next day they caught up with Clark at Camp Fortunate, the scene of the joyful reunion of Sacagawea and her people in August 1805. The men pulled their canoes out of the pond in which they had been submerged for almost a year. Indians had taken pieces of metal from the canoes, but all but one of the seven boats was still usable. They also opened the cache they had made near the river and found the items inside were in good condition. On the morning of the 10th they headed north down the Beaverhead River. Ordway was in command of the boats, Clark's horse party followed on land.<sup>43</sup>

When they reached Three Forks on the 13th, Clark went east overland toward the Yellowstone River. Ordway continued with the canoes down the Missouri. It was indeed a blessing to go with the current and to travel in one day the same distance that had taken a week in 1805. But the trip to the Great Falls was not without hardship. Tents and mosquito nets had long since rotted away, leaving the men little cover against storms and insects. "My face and eyes are Swelled by the poison of these insects," Ordway wrote on July 18th. Hard wind can ground even the most determined mosquito, but on the Missouri it blew so hard at times that the canoes could make no headway and the party beached the boats and waited for the wind to die. But then the mosquitoes returned, and so it went.<sup>44</sup>

On the 19th Ordway's detachment reached Gass's camp above the Great Falls. For a week the combined detachments hauled canoes on primitive carts along the nineteen miles of the portage route through clouds of mosquitoes, rain and hail, cactus, snakes, and grizzlies. Back on the river below the falls on July 27th, they rendezvoused with Lewis and his party on the 28th and continued down the river to a reunion with Clark's detachment and the final leg of the Expedition to St. Louis.<sup>45</sup>

Ordway traveled to Washington, D. C. with Lewis, Clark, the Mandan chief Sheheke, and the other members of the post-Expedition entourage. He went north to see his family and married a woman named Elizabeth either in New Hampshire or in Missouri when he

returned there in 1807. The romantic in us wants this to be the "Betsey" he referred to in his letter to his parents, but we can't be sure. With his land grant as a core, he soon had a farm of a thousand acres near New Madrid in the southeastern corner of Missouri. He and Elizabeth had two children, John and Hanna. John Ordway, third in command of the Corps of Discovery, died sometime between 1811 and 1819.<sup>46</sup>







# 15

## George Drouillard: The Warrior



*Scout, interpreter, hunter, warrior:  
George Drouillard was perhaps  
the most valuable member of the  
Corps of Discovery.*

The failure of Ensign Nathaniel Pryor's 1807 attempt to return the Mandan chief Sheheke to his village was a setback for American prestige on the Missouri River. It demonstrated both how naïve Lewis and Clark had been in their efforts to promote peace among the tribes along the river and the ability of the Arikaras to block an American mission through force of arms. It was a dangerous precedent.

Two years later another attempt was organized in St. Louis, one more commercial than military but with a large force of armed men. Its origins were in

the success of Manuel Lisa's fur trade expedition on the Yellowstone River in 1807–8. In the summer of 1808 Lisa returned to St. Louis with his furs. George Drouillard, formerly the interpreter of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, accompanied him.<sup>1</sup>

Lisa's success caused great excitement in St. Louis and resulted in the birth of the Missouri Fur Company, a firm that numbered among its investors prominent businessmen and government officials, including William Clark and Meriwether Lewis. A much larger expeditionary force, commanded by Lisa and Pierre Choteau, headed up the Missouri with Sheheke in 1809. Two of Drouillard's former mates, John Collins and Richard Windsor, joined the force but soon got fed up with Manuel Lisa's style of leadership and quit. Choteau bluffed his way past the Arikaras and safely delivered the Mandan chief to his people. From the Mandan villages the company sent a large party up the Missouri and Yellowstone to prepare for another attempt to trap the Three Forks area of the Missouri, where the Blackfeet were masters of the land.<sup>2</sup>

In April 1810 a party of trappers led by Pierre Menard were breaking their way through deep snowdrifts on their way from the Yellowstone River to the Three Forks when they happened upon the scene of murder. A Shoshone woman and boy sprawled dead on the snow, their skulls split open, probably by tomahawks. It was not an auspicious start to a spring trapping season. The party went on and finally reached the Three Forks, where they set about



the construction of a fort at the confluence of the Madison and Jefferson Rivers. Others went out to set their traps for beaver.<sup>3</sup>

It didn't take long for the "pirates of the Rockies" to find them. Gros Ventre warriors butchered three trappers on April 12. Two more disappeared. John Colter decided that he had had enough and headed down the Missouri in a dugout canoe. Menard issued an order that trappers would venture out only in large groups. The next several weeks were quiet. George Drouillard, who preferred to work alone, went out one morning about a mile from the fort. He returned the next day with six pelts. "This is the way to catch beavers," he told the others. Warned of the risk he was running, Drouillard, who was half Shawnee, replied that he was just "too much of an Indian to be caught by Indians." Once again he left the fort overnight and returned with a good catch.<sup>4</sup>

None of the others imitated Drouillard. John Colter became the most famous veteran of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, but George Drouillard was probably the most valuable member of the Corps of Discovery, excepting the two captains. Lewis wrote the following of Drouillard after the Expedition:

*"A man of much merit; he has been peculiarly usefull from his knowledge of the common language of gesticulation [sign language], and his uncommon skill as a hunter and woodsman; those several duties he performed in*

*good faith, and with an ardor which deserves the highest commendation. It was his fate also to have encountered, on various occasions, with either Captain Clark or myself, all the most dangerous and trying scenes of the voyage, in which he uniformly acquitted himself with honor...."*<sup>5</sup>

Drouillard's mother was Shawnee but his father was French-Canadian. Pierre Drouillard served as an interpreter for the American colonists during their War for Independence. In that service he was associated with legendary frontiersman Simon Kenton and George Rogers Clark, William Clark's brother and the man who saved the trans-Appalachian frontier for the United States.<sup>6</sup>

George Drouillard was employed as an interpreter at Fort Massac on the Ohio River when Lewis and Clark arrived at the fort in November 1803. The plan for the Expedition appealed to Drouillard and joined the Corps as an interpreter at a salary of \$25 a month, five times what a private in the army earned in 1803. Lewis and Clark sent Drouillard (whose name they misspelled as "Drewyer") to South West Point, Tennessee, to collect a detachment of potential recruits that they had expected would be waiting for them at Ft. Massac. Drouillard delivered the eight men to the winter quarters at Camp Wood, Illinois, in late December.<sup>7</sup>

Quickly claiming the role of the Corps' best hunter, Drouillard also served as a courier and helped the captains select the French engages who manned one of

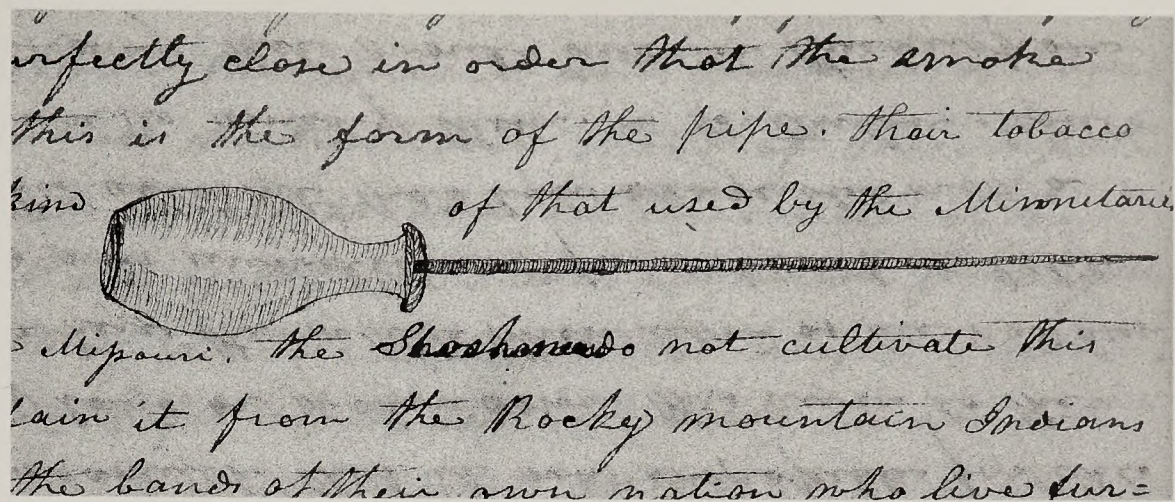
the pirogues in 1804. Once the Corps was underway up the Missouri, Drouillard hunted and scouted ahead of the boats and, on at least one occasion, behind. While Drouillard was on a hunting foray with Private John Shields, it began to rain and for a week hardly let up. Creeks became rivers. The two men built one raft after another as they splashed and polled their way across a soggy landscape to catch up with the Expedition.<sup>8</sup> In August Drouillard was given command of the posse sent to apprehend Private Moses Reed, the would-be deserter.<sup>9</sup>

By the spring of 1805 many of the provisions that had been boated up the river in the keelboat and pirogues had been depleted. As the Corps set out once again up the Missouri, they would depend more upon the skill of the hunters. Fortunately, once the Expedition had gotten beyond hunting range of the Mandan villages, game was plentiful. The members of the corps took a great interest in the skill of Drouillard and the other hunter. For a different reason, they too careful note of Drouillard's kill on April 12th: a beaver.<sup>10</sup> What was significant was that he had shot the beaver swimming in the river in broad daylight. Beaver are seldom seen during the day in an area where they're being trapped or hunted. Three weeks later Drouillard shot one of the first grizzlies the Corps had seen<sup>11</sup>, and three weeks after that a bighorn sheep.<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps George Drouillard's most important contribution to the Expedition was his interpretation for



Lewis's drawing of a Shoshone smoking pipe from his journal entry for August 13, 1805. George Drouillard used sign language to interpret lengthy discussions between Lewis and the Shoshone chief Cameahwait.



Lewis with the Lemhi Shoshone in August 1805. The future of the Expedition depended upon quickly establishing a friendly relationship with the tribe, who lived at the portage of the continental divide known now as Lemhi Pass in the Beaverhead Mountains between Idaho and Montana. After failing twice to approach Shoshones seen at a distance, the advance party of Lewis, Drouillard, Shields, and McNeal almost literally bumped into three Lemhi women near the Lemhi River on August 13th.

The instant response of the women to their sudden encounter with the four strange men offers a sad insight into the presence of danger in the lives of the Lemhi women: if you saw a man you did not recognize, you would be kidnapped, raped, or murdered. A younger woman began to run. An older woman and a young girl sat down and bowed their heads, Lewis surmised, "as if reconciled to die." Lewis's gentle approach to the women and the gifts he offered them put them at ease. Lewis had Drouillard ask the older woman in sign language to "recall the young woman who had run off."<sup>13</sup>

When she returned "almost out of breath," Lewis gave her some gifts, painted the cheeks of all three women with vermilion and told Drouillard to ask the women to take his party to their camp. Lewis's party had gone about two miles toward the camp when a ground-shaking mounted charge of sixty Shoshone warriors introduced the next "interpretive moment." Fortunately, the women took control of

the situation. They showed the men the gifts and the vermilion. Wouldn't we love to know what the women said to the men!

Whatever it was, it worked famously. The men came over and greeted Lewis's party with what Lewis called "the national hug," of which, he soon grew "heartily tired." Following a shared ceremony of pipe smoking, Lewis distributed more gifts among the men. He told them, through Drouillard, that the purpose of his visit to the tribe was friendly and that he would explain more fully what had brought them here when they reached the Indians' main camp, near present-day Baker, Idaho.<sup>14</sup>

At the Lemhi camp, the explorers were treated with great courtesy and hospitality, like visiting royalty. The Lemhi Shoshone had heard of white men, but none of the people in Cameahwait's camp had ever seen one. During the previous winter Lewis had learned about the Lemhis from the Hidatsa, who frequently raided them for horses, scalps, and captives. He had much more to learn from the people themselves during the days to come. To give Clark time to get the boats to the forks of the Beaverhead, the absolute head of navigation, Lewis and Drouillard talked with Cameahwait for most of the 14th.

Drouillard explained to the chief why they had come and why they needed help from his people if they were to continue on. He told Cameahwait about Clark and the rest of the Corps of Discovery and the boats that would

soon arrive at the forks across the mountains. And he asked the chief if his people would be willing to help them pack their baggage across the mountains. Ah, yes, the mountains. Ask him, Lewis said to Drouillard, to tell us about these mountains. Is there a navigable river nearby that passes through them? So Cameahwait gave Drouillard and Lewis a lesson in Idaho geography. What makes central Idaho today the largest wilderness in the continental United States is what made the good will and trust of the Lemhi Shoshone indispensable to the Expedition.<sup>15</sup>

Many of the Lemhi people were reluctant to trust Lewis and his men because they had come from the east, from the Missouri River lands of their enemies, the Blackfoot, Atsina, and Hidatsa. The Lemhis were forced to hide in the mountains, Cameahwait said, because their enemies had firearms and hunted his people, murdering them "without respect to sex or age" and stealing their horses. Lewis and Drouillard told Cameahwait about the message of peace they had preached to the tribes along the Missouri. When they returned from their journey to the Pacific, they would try to convince the Hidatsa to quit raiding the Shoshone. And following their return home, American traders would make their way to the Lemhis "with an abundance of guns and every other article necessary to their defence and comfort." It naturally followed that helping the Expedition cross the divide and continue its journey was the best way to hasten the arrival of the traders.<sup>16</sup>



But many of the Lemhis were suspicious of Lewis and the others, fearing that they were "in league" with their enemies and were leading them into an ambush. Only about twenty Lemhis went with Lewis's party all the way to the forks of the Beaverhead.<sup>17</sup> And although Lewis and Drouillard worked very hard to build trust among the Lemhis, much of the credit must go to Cameahwait for his leadership and to the courage of the individual Lemhis who went with Lewis.

After the reunion and conference at Camp Fortunate, Lewis and Drouillard remained at the camp while Clark and his detachment re-crossed the divide to scout the Salmon River. Game was scarce at the forks of the Beaverhead and Lewis needed his best hunter. He bought a horse from the Shoshones for Drouillard's use. It was on a hunting excursion that Drouillard had perhaps the only unpleasant encounter had by a member of the Corps of Discovery. He was hunting in what Lewis and Clark called Shoshone Cove but is known today as Horse Prairie, the valley that lies between the forks of the Beaverhead and the eastern approach to Lemhi Pass.

Drouillard came upon a small group of Shoshones, three men and three women. Dismounting, he turned his horse loose to graze and went over to visit with them. Soon the Lemhis decided to leave. Drouillard, also, got up and walked over to get his horse. He left his rifle on the ground where he had been sitting, and the temptation proved too great. One of the Shoshone men picked

up the gun, and they all jumped on their horses and galloped west toward Lemhi Pass. Drouillard quickly mounted his horse and started after them. They had gone about ten miles when the horses that two of the women were riding began to tire. The man who had stolen the gun came back toward them. Drouillard came up and indicated by signs that he had not wish to harm the women. When the man with his gun came near, Drouillard dashed toward him and wrestled his rifle away from the man.

On his way back to Camp Fortunate Drouillard returned to the camp that the six Lemhis had left behind in their unsuccessful attempt at theft. The fact that they had been willing to sacrifice their few possessions to rob Drouillard of his rifle indicates just how valuable the weapon would have been to its would-be owner. When he recovered his rifle, Drouillard had wisely decided to allow the thief to leave unharmed, but he bundled up the baggage the Lemhis had left and carried it back to Camp Fortunate.<sup>18</sup>

The incident was a notable exception in the otherwise friendly relationship between the Corps of Discovery and the Lemhi Shoshone. Nor was the attempted robbery typical of the Lemhis, whom the members of the Expedition found to be honest and trustworthy. With the help of the Lemhis, the Corps crossed the divide and the northern Rockies to navigable waters on Idaho's Clearwater River. But the Lemhis waited in vain for the American traders Lewis had said would come. The enemy tribes who

controlled the upper Missouri and the approaches to the land of the Shoshone would not permit the arming of the Lemhis.<sup>19</sup>

Almost five years after he had last seen the Jefferson River with the Corps of Discovery, George Drouillard returned to make a living with his traps. The Shawnee warrior who was too much of an Indian to be caught by Indians failed to return one day to the little fort at Three Forks. Thomas James of the Missouri Fur Company describes what his friends found when they went out to look for Drouillard:

*"Druyer and his horse lay dead, the former mangled in a horrible manner; his head was cut off, his entrails torn out, and his body hacked to pieces. We saw from the marks on the ground that he must have fought in a circle on horseback, and probably killed some of his enemies, being a brave man, and well armed with a rifle, pistol, knife and tomahawk."*<sup>20</sup>

James and the others hastily buried the pieces of George Drouillard. They soon left the Three Forks. If they could kill George Drouillard, no one was safe.



# 16

# York



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*The only descriptions of York indicate that he was a large, strong man. His re-entry to “normal” life following the Expedition was particularly hard.*

If one of the purposes of history is to help people connect with the past by showing them what they have in common with their ancestors, then it is also important to consider those things that separate us from the past. The social, legal, and moral circumstances that made an African-American man named only “York” a member of the Corps of Discovery because he was the property of one of the commanders are familiar to Americans. We know the history, but how can we comprehend a society that permitted slavery? Like it or not, York’s

presence on the Expedition is a reminder that the United States of two centuries ago was a profoundly different place. If there’s any redemption to be found in the Expedition, perhaps it is the absence of any evidence that York was not treated as an equal member of the Corps.

What we know of York’s childhood can only be on general terms. While the patterns of the institution of slavery have been studied and documented, the keeping of individual records that did



not directly relate to their status as property was rare. William Clark and York would have been about the same age because parents usually chose a slave who would become their son's personal "manservant" from among his playmates. Odd as it seems, white and slave children were raised together and played together until the slave boy or girl turned twelve years old. Most were then sent to labor in the fields. A fortunate few joined the household staff of servants. Since Clark was born in 1770, York was probably born about the same time. The Clark family, and their slaves, moved from Virginia to Kentucky in 1784.<sup>1</sup>

From 1789 to 1796 William Clark served in the military. It was during this time that he met Meriwether Lewis. We don't know if York accompanied Clark as a servant or helped the Clark family work their farm Mulberry Hill, which was several miles south of Louisville. Clark's father John owned York until he died in 1799. In his will John Clark left his son William eight slaves, including "one Negroe man named York, Also old York, and his wife Rose, and their two Children Nancy and Juba." We can't be sure, but it's likely this was York's family: his parents, sister and brother.<sup>2</sup> Not all slave owners made it a point to keep families together if there was greater profit to be made by selling them separately.

From 1796 to 1803 William Clark traveled extensively in his efforts to help his brother George Rogers Clark, who was beset with numerous legal and financial problems. There is no

record to prove it, but we can assume that York accompanied Clark as his personal servant to care for their horses, pack and unpack Clark's baggage, bring him meals, and other common duties. Clark sold Mulberry Hill in 1803. He and York were living with George Rogers Clark at Clarksville, Indiana, when he received Lewis's invitation to join the Expedition.<sup>3</sup>

No written document has been found concerning Clark's decision to bring York with him. We're left again with assumptions. York must have met the high physical standards the Captains set. Having a manservant would free Lewis and Clark to meet the many daily obligations of President Jefferson's detailed instructions for the Expedition. York could fill the role of orderly or servant for both officers that would normally be the responsibility of an enlisted man. He became a part of their family, in a sense, sharing their meals and sleeping quarters, as the Charbonneau family would when they joined the Corps. And it's certainly probable that Clark liked York and wanted his companionship.

Once York climbed on the keelboat with Captain Clark in the autumn of 1803, he became a member of the Corps of Discovery. It becomes difficult to find in the journals any passages that comment on his unique status as slave. From the beginning the officers made it clear that all members would share in the duties expected of a soldier. So during the construction of Camp Wood in December York was put to work on one end of a whipsaw making planks. York's

status did carry some benefits. On April 7, 1804, for example, York accompanied Clark to a ball in St. Louis.<sup>4</sup>

Other impressions of York emerge from the journals doing the first year of the Expedition. York was a big man and strong enough to carry a deer back to camp. In fact, Clark thought York was a little too big. York accompanied him on a long hike on August 25th and became, Clark wrote, "nearly exosted with heat thirst and fatigue, he being fat and unaccustomed to walk as fast as I went was the cause..."<sup>5</sup> York was compassionate and had a gentle side. He helped Clark nurse Sgt. Charles Floyd through the sad hours of his losing battle with a fatal illness.<sup>6</sup> At least once he swam out to an island to gather wild greens for a meal.<sup>7</sup>

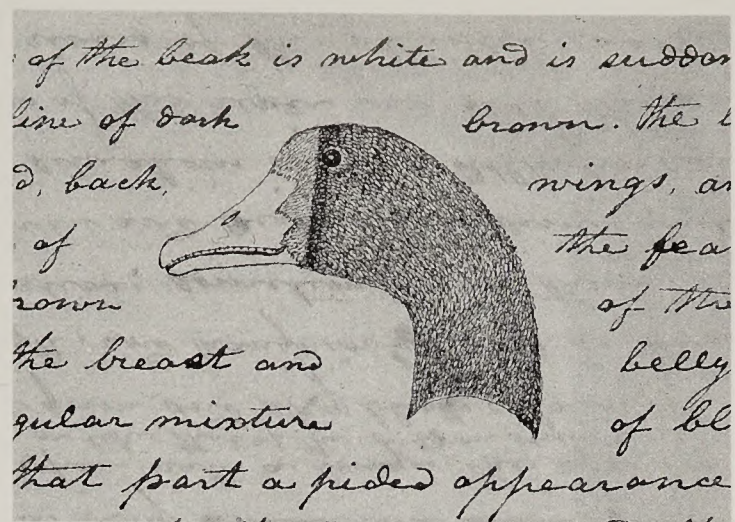
York made quite an impression on the Indians the Corps encountered, most of whom had never seen a man whose skin was so naturally dark. On October 10, 1805, Clark described the reaction York caused among the Arikara nation and how his servant seized the moment:

*the Inds. Much astonished at my black Servent. Who made him Self more terrible in their view than I wished him to Doe as I am told telling them that before I cought him he was wild & lived upon people, young children was verry good eating Showed them his strength, &c, &c.*<sup>8</sup>

Sometimes Indians upon seeing York for the first time would refuse to believe that York's skin pigment wasn't paint



A Lewis drawing of the head of a  
brant, greater white-fronted  
goose, March 15, 1806.



and were amazed when they found that it wouldn't rub off.<sup>9</sup> Big medicine! On New Year's Day York and fifteen other men from the Corps went to entertain the Mandans with music and dancing. They had a horn, tambourine, and fiddles. The men fired a volley into the air before they entered the village, marched into the central plaza playing the instruments, and "commenced dancing."

The revelers went from one lodge to another in the afternoon, playing and dancing as if they were a combination minstrel show and parade. The Indians rewarded them corn and buffalo robes. When Clark came up to visit later in the day, he found the Indians "much pleased with the Dancing of our men." Clark then had York do a dance the Indians hadn't seen him do yet. York's dance "Some what astonished them, that So large a man Should be active, Etc. Etc."<sup>10</sup>

York was allowed to hunt on the Expedition, something that would have been unimaginable at home. Slaves were not permitted access to firearms. And though he was probably not the only slave to ever carry a gun, he may have been the only one to ever have one bent by a buffalo. On May 29th, 1805, the Corps was camped on the Missouri River near present day Judith Landing, Montana. During the night a large bull apparently swam across the river and landed next to one of the pirogues. Bison bulls have the idea that they can go over or through pretty much whatever gets in their way, and this one was no exception.

But the bull had apparently never climbed over a pirogue before. The unexpected difficulty and the sudden scent of thirty or more people precipitated a panic. The bull stumbled out of the boat and ran through the camp. According to Lewis, he "was within 18 inches of the heads of some of the men who lay sleeping before the centenil could alarm him or make him change his course." The bull would have trampled the tent occupied by the officers, York, and the Charbonneaus if Seaman, Lewis's Newfoundland dog, had not charged him and caused him to change his path. Alas, poor York. The next morning it was found that the bull had bent York's rifle as it scrambled to get out of the pirogue.<sup>11</sup>

A month later York was nearby when Clark and the Charbonneaus came close to being swept to their deaths in a flash flood. They were exploring near the Great Falls when a bad storm came down upon them. York had gone to hunt. Clark and the Charbonneaus sought shelter from the storm under a rocky outcrop in a ravine off the river. This is not wilderness textbook survival behavior. A wall of water, mud, and rocks about fifteen feet high came suddenly crashing down the ravine toward them. They managed to climb to safety, but lost several items, including a compass, rifle, ammunition, powder horn, and the mosquito net in which the baby had been carried by his mother.<sup>12</sup>

There are few journal references to York during the difficult overland trek between the Missouri and Columbia Rivers. At one point Clark allowed him

to ride a horse when he feet became too sore to walk.<sup>13</sup> On the lower Columbia he displayed a talent for hunting waterfowl.<sup>14</sup> During the construction of Ft. Clatsop, York suffered severe muscle strains from lifting logs and carrying game back to the fort. He also came down with a "violent cold" and suffered from constipation.<sup>15</sup> York went out fishing and got lost for several days.<sup>16</sup> The injuries, the illnesses, the disorientation of the dense green land where visibility is limited and the sun usually hidden behind a thick layer of gray mist: these were common experiences among his comrades that winter. But when he was lost, did York contemplate freedom? Could he have found a band of Indians willing to hide him until the Corps left in the spring or to pass him along from village to village until he was far away from his master and owner?

It seems fair to suggest that York felt himself part of the Corps, that he belonged. There is no evidence in the journals that he ever was subjected to a derogatory word or act during the Expedition because of his race or status as a slave. How different, then, must York's thoughts have been during the homeward journey in 1806, with every mile taking him that much closer to his old status as a slave, where he dare not assume an equal status or even too close a familiarity with the white men who had been his comrades for almost three years?

Following the Expedition York and Clark started east with Lewis and the other members of the party bound for



Washington, D.C. and Thomas Jefferson. Clark and York spent some time visiting family in the Louisville area before they continued on, arriving in Washington several weeks after Lewis. A Clark family tradition has York enjoying a happy reunion with his own family, highlighted by "dramatic" telling of his adventures on the Expedition.<sup>17</sup>

Clark married Julia Hancock in the East and returned to St. Louis to assume his duties as the newly appointed Superintendent of Indians Affairs for Louisiana Territory. During this time York apparently married a slave who lived near Louisville.<sup>18</sup> In 1808 York sought Clark's required permission to go to Louisville, hire himself out as a laborer, and send his salary back to Clark. Clark was only willing to allow York permission for a short visit to Louisville to see his wife. In a letter to his brother Jonathan, Clark stated that if York refused to work or tried to run off while he was in Louisville, he would sell him "down the river" to New Orleans or have him hired out to a "Sevare Master."<sup>19</sup>

It's an ugly postscript to the Expedition; the relationship between Clark and York had become a troubled one. From a personal manservant to being hired out as a laborer or sold down the river was a disturbing and potentially dangerous decline in York's status. What had happened between them? Or, more to the point, why was York still a slave? Clark believed that in principle slavery was wrong. In a document freeing another of his slaves shortly after his return from the Expedition, Clark called slav-

ery "contrary to the principles of natural justice."<sup>20</sup>

It may have been that York, having experienced something more like freedom than anything he had ever known before, was unwilling to resume his former status. Clark wrote that York "has got such a notion about freedom and emence Services [during the Expedition] that I do not expect he will be of much Service to me again."<sup>21</sup> In racist jargon, he had become "uppity." York returned to St. Louis in 1809. Clark found his servant to be so "insolent and sulky" that he lost his temper and gave York a "Sever trouncing."<sup>22</sup> Here is certainly one of the saddest footnotes to the Expedition. In 1810 Clark hired York out for a period of one year.<sup>23</sup> There seems to be no evidence as to whether or not York was ever reunited with his wife. Slaves marriages had no legal status.

Clark freed York and several other slaves sometime after 1812. We learn this from notes made by the author Washington Irving in a visit with Clark in 1832. Clark told Irving that he had given York "a large waggon & team of six horse to ply" between Nashville, Tennessee and Richmond, Kentucky. It didn't go well for York. According to Irving's notes, York neglected his horses. Two died and he had to sell the others. Another story circulated that York began to drink heavily and told tall tales in taverns of his exploits during the Expedition. He decided to return to Clark in St. Louis but died of cholera in Tennessee.<sup>24</sup>

It's hard to say how much of this is

true, how much Clark's interpretation, and how much Irving's. It's certainly true that many freed slaves found life very difficult, particularly in slave states like Tennessee and Kentucky. But history does not permit us to close the case-book on York yet. In 1832 a novice fur trapper named Zenas Leonard was a member of a party from whom Crow Indians stole several horses in present day Wyoming. The mountain men tracked the stolen animals to the Crow village, where they found:

*a Negro man, who informed us that he first came into this country with Lewis and Clark—with whom he also returned to the state of Missouri, and in a few years returned with a Mr. Mackinney, a trader on the Missouri river, and has remained here ever since—which is about ten or twelve years. He has acquired a correct knowledge of their manner of living, and speaks their language fluently. He has rose to be quite a considerable character, or chief, in their village; at least he assumes all the dignities of a chief, for he has four wives with whom he lives alternately....*

This man advised the trappers to give the Crows some gifts for the horses, which they did. Two years later Leonard again visited the Crows and witnessed this same black man lead the Crows in a battle in which they annihilated a Blackfoot war party. Could this have been York? The answer, if it exists, is perhaps still waiting out there somewhere.<sup>25</sup>





Meriwether Lewis's dog gave "the last full measure of devotion" to his master.

"Seaman" was certainly an appropriate name for the sole canine member of the Corps of Discovery. Lewis's pet and companion was a Newfoundland, a Canadian breed developed for service at sea. The exact origins are debatable, but "Newfs" came into their own in the fishing fleets of Canada's maritime provinces. A double coat of hair protects a Newfoundland: a woolly under layer for insulation and an outer layer of long, oily guard hairs that shed water. Newfoundlands are strong, gentle giants. Adults can weigh up to 150 pounds. Sailors trained Newfoundlands to recover people or objects that had fallen overboard. In a storm they can swim to shore through rough, cold

waters with a line to make landing or docking a boat safer. They are by breeding very good-natured and a friend to all.<sup>1</sup>

It's thought that Lewis acquired Seaman in Philadelphia during his preparations for the Expedition in 1803.<sup>2</sup> He is first mentioned in Lewis's journal on September 11, almost two weeks after Lewis had started down the Ohio River from Pittsburgh in the keel-boat. Squirrels swimming the river were in jeopardy:

*I made my dog take as many each day as I had occasion for. They were fat and I thought when fried a pleasant food. They swim very light on the water and make pretty good speed. My dog was of the Newfoundland breed, very active, strong and docile. He would take the squirrels in the water, kill them, and swimming bring them in his mouth to the boat.<sup>3</sup>*

As a hunter and a watchdog Seaman was on sensory overload when the Corps headed west up the Missouri from Ft. Mandan in April 1805. He retrieved birds, deer, and a pronghorn antelope from the Missouri River. On May 19th a wounded beaver that Seaman swam out to catch bit him in a rear leg, severing an artery. "It was with great difficulty," wrote Lewis, "that I could stop the blood." Seaman almost bled to death, but soon recovered.<sup>4</sup>

On the 29th of May, a large bison bull blundered into camp at night after swimming the river. In his panic he



almost trampled some of the men who were sleeping and was headed directly for the tent in which the officers and Charbonneau family slept had Seaman not charged the bull, causing him to "change his course."<sup>5</sup> Bison were everywhere and Seaman gradually became less concerned about them. But grizzlies were another matter, particularly when they were encountered in such numbers as they were near the Great Falls. On June 19th Lewis noted in his journal that Seaman "barked very much and seemed extremely uneasy, which was unusual with him. A week later during the portage around the Great Falls, a grizzly ate thirty pounds of buffalo suet that the men had hung up on a pole near camp. "My dog seems to be in a constant state of alarm with these bears," Lewis wrote, "and keeps barking all night."<sup>6</sup>

The prickly pear cactus and needle and thread grass growing in the Great Falls area tormented Seaman as much as they did the other members of the Corps, according to Lewis:

*These barbed seeds penetrate our moccasins and leather leggings and give great pain until they are removed. My poor dog suffers with them excessively. He is constantly biting and scratching himself as if in a rage of pain.*<sup>7</sup>

Seaman's size, strength, and intelligence made him a star attraction in the Lewis and Clark traveling circus. In November 1803 a Shawnee offered Lewis three beaver pelts for Seaman.<sup>8</sup> No deal. In August 1805 Seaman's "sagacity" excited "astonishment" among the Lemhi

Shoshone.<sup>9</sup> During the return up the Columbia River in the spring of 1806, several Indians tried to steal Lewis's dog. He sent three men after them "with orders that if [the Indians] made the least resistance or difficulty in surrendering the dog to fire upon them."<sup>10</sup>

The last journal entry concerning Seaman is in Lewis's July 15, 1806, entry at the Great Falls:

*the mosquitoes continue to infest us in such a manner that we can scarcely exist...my dog even howls with the torture he experiences from them.*<sup>11</sup>

Two days later Lewis left the falls to explore the Marias River. It's very unlikely that Seaman accompanied Lewis on this reconnaissance. He did not go with Lewis's advance party across Lemhi Pass, a less dangerous mission. Did he survive the Expedition? It's quite unlikely that Lewis would not have described the death of his dog in his journal. Did he remain with Lewis? Until recently this has been one of mysteries of the Expedition: we just didn't know what happened to Seaman. That may have changed. In the February 2000 edition of *We Proceeded On*, the journal of the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation, James Holmberg relates the story of a book. Timothy Alden, a pastor and educator, published *A Collection of American Epitaphs and Inscriptions with Occasional Notes* in 1814. Entry 916 quotes the inscription written on a dog collar on display at a museum in Alexandria, Virginia:

*The greatest traveler of my species. My name is Seaman, the dog of Captain Meriwether Lewis, whom I accompanied to the Pacific Ocean through the interior of the continent of North America.*

William Clark had apparently been donated the collar to the museum. Seeking more information, Alden learned that Seaman and Lewis had not parted, and that Seaman was with Lewis on his last, fatal journey. According to Alden, Seaman refused to leave Lewis's body. Even after Lewis was buried, "no gentle means would draw him from the spot of internment. He refused to take every kind of food, which was offered him, and actually pined away and died with grief upon his master's grave."<sup>12</sup> Sorrows in battalions, not as single spies.

*His muzzle caked with dirt,*

*Seaman suddenly lifts his head,  
flop ears alert,*

*Out of the ground squirrel burrow  
he has been dismantling.*

*There it is again-Lewis's whistle.*

*The Newfoundland sprints for camp,*

*A black, shaggy cyclone pounding  
puffs of dust into the evening air.*

*Meriwether Lewis laughs out loud  
at the sight.*

*He caps his inkwell and closes his  
journal a split second before  
Seaman lands in his lap.*



# 18

## The Charbonneau Family



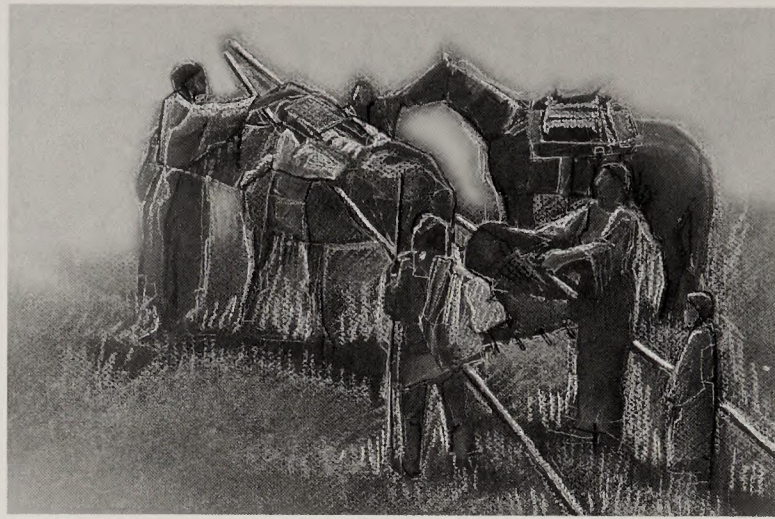
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*“Remarkably small” and lighter in color than Charbonneau’s other Shoshone wife are the only physical descriptions we have of Madame Charbonneau.*

In the autumn of 1800, several families of Lemhi Shoshone were camped at the Forks of the Missouri River. They had come to hunt buffalo because they needed a good supply of dried meat to survive the winters in their mountain homeland on Idaho’s Lemhi and Salmon Rivers. The autumn hunt on the

Missouri always involved great risk. The enemies of the Lemhi people, the Blackfeet, Atsina and Hidatsa, were armed with guns they obtained from Canadian fur traders. They preyed upon the Shoshone for scalps, horses, and captives, especially women for wives. One day the Lemhis suddenly saw a





*The Lemhi Shoshones needed to bring home from the plains 15 to 20 tons of dried buffalo meat every winter.*

Hidatsa war party galloping toward their camp. The Shoshones fled up the river several miles, but the Hidatsa warriors followed and caught them. They murdered four men and four women and several boys. Four boys and several girls were captured. According to Lemhi Shoshone tradition, two girls managed to escape during the journey and make their way back to the tribe.<sup>1</sup>

A girl of twelve years was unable to escape with her two friends and was taken far to the east to live among the Hidatsa. Sometime during the next few years she became the woman of a French Canadian trader named Toussaint Charbonneau in circumstances that are still debated. He was born near Montreal about 1758 but spent most of the rest of his life at trading posts, forts, and Indian camps on the northern plains. Charbonneau had a minor gift for language that provided him with a decent living as an interpreter for many decades. In addition to Hidatsa, he could speak the Mandan and Crow languages and the universal sign language of the plains. When Lewis and Clark met Charbonneau, he was in his forties and a confirmed polygamist who loved young Indian girls and could afford them. His income from trade and interpreting enabled him to obtain a long succession of women from their kidnappers or families.<sup>2</sup>

According to William Clark, Charbonneau acquired our Lemhi Shoshone girl and another Shoshone girl from a more southerly band through "purchase from the Indians."<sup>3</sup> Since she gave birth to

their son Jean Baptiste in February 1805,<sup>4</sup> she presumably became Charbonneau's mate no later than the spring of 1804. If Charbonneau knew anything of her life during the years between her capture and her "marriage" to Charbonneau, he apparently said nothing about it to Lewis or Clark. Charbonneau seems to have called the Lemhi girl "Janey," though it's possible that the name was actually "Jenny" distorted by his own pronunciation and Clark's free spirited spelling.<sup>5</sup> She had also been given a Hidatsa name: Sacagawea or Sakakawea, which meant "Bird Woman." In the journals she is often referred to as the interpreter's wife, woman, or squaw, or the "Indian woman."<sup>6</sup>

Salmon, Idaho, considers itself her "birthplace," though no record exists to either prove or disprove this claim of "oral tradition." Local tradition in Tendoy, Idaho, is even more specific: she was born on lower Pattee Creek, two miles north of Tendoy. What can be said with some certainty is that at the time Janey was born, about 1788, the Lemhi Shoshones spent most of the year in Idaho's Lemhi and Salmon River valleys and the surrounding mountains. This is what the Shoshone chief Cameahwait, Janey's brother, told Lewis. In the early 1700s the Lemhi Shoshones acquired horses, probably from other Shoshone bands to the south. For several decades they were able to venture onto the Montana plains of the Missouri and Yellowstone River valleys to hunt bison. But when their enemies the Blackfeet, Atsina and Hidatsa obtained firearms from

Canadian traders, bison hunting became a very risky business.<sup>7</sup>

Cameahwait, complained bitterly to Lewis and Clark about how guns had shifted the balance of power. Before the Shoshones could come within striking distance with arrows or lances, their enemies could kill or wound them with bullets. So Janey's people remained within their mountain homeland as long as they were able to procure enough fish, small game, berries and roots to sustain life. But they needed bison jerky to eat during the winter, when hunting was difficult so they went in the autumn to the plains to hunt buffalo.<sup>8</sup> Normally they would go only in large bands, and at times would join together to hunt with other tribes like the Montana Salish, for there was safety in numbers.<sup>9</sup> But the hunt would sometimes scatter the Lemhis into small bands or large families. And sometimes their enemies would find them when they were easy prey, like they were at the forks of the Missouri in 1800.

A Lemhi Shoshone child might not receive a name until something significant happened in her life that would suggest a name. Historian John Rees, who lived among the Lemhis in the late 1800s, claimed that following Janey's capture her people referred to her as "Wadze-wipe," meaning "lost woman."<sup>10</sup> The Lemhi Shoshone prefer "Sacajawea," but there is disagreement over the meaning of the name. In the past it has been interpreted to mean "boat launcher" or "boat puller," which conforms to Lemhi naming tradition.



When the "lost woman" returned home, she was a member of a party who were indeed pulling boats up a river: something the Lemhis had probably never seen before. Another Lemhi interpretation has been asserted for Sacajawea: "burden, or one who bears a burden." This is said to be either a birth name prophecy about her life or a humorous reference to her husband Toussaint after she had had a chance to tell her Lemhi friends and family members about her man or they had had been around him long enough to form their own opinions.

"Sacajawea" was possibly a name she received from her tribe when she returned to them for two weeks in August 1805. Both "boat puller" and "burden" make sense in this context. It's possible that they continued to refer to her as Sacajawea after she had left. Further evidence for the theory that she was not named Sacajawea before she was kidnapped comes from Lewis's efforts in August 1805 to persuade the Lemhis to help the Expedition. He mentioned to them several times that a young Shoshone woman who had been kidnapped several years before was with his party across the divide. Had she already been named Sacajawea, it seems very unlikely that she would not have said to Lewis, "Tell them Sacajawea has returned."

There is no evidence of a change in name in the journals of the Expedition, however. After the Corps left the Lemhi Shoshone, she is still Sacagawea or Janey. When the first edition of the journals was published in 1814, her

name had become Sacajawea. Scholars have tried unsuccessfully to explain why editor Nicholas Biddle substituted "j" for "g." If Sacajawea was a truly a name she was given in August 1805, Clark may have eventually become aware of it and passed on the information to Biddle.

Had there been no Lewis and Clark Expedition, who today would know anything about her? It was on the 4th of November 1804 that Janey entered the historical record. The Corps of Discovery had selected the site for Ft. Mandan and had just begun construction. Word of the Expedition and their stated goal of exploring their way to the Pacific made the rounds in the Mandan and Hidatsa villages. Charbonneau came to Lewis and Clark asking for work as a Hidatsa interpreter. Two of his wives (he may have had three) were Shoshone, he told the officers. The Shoshone lived at the "height of land" said to separate the Missouri River from the Columbia and had many horses. A Shoshone woman to interpret with her people was an unexpected windfall for the Expedition<sup>11</sup>

The Corps may have first met Janey a week later when Charbonneau's wives came to the fort with a gift of four buffalo robes. We can only imagine the joy she felt when she learned from her husband that the two of them would be going to her homeland with the band of white men who were building the new fort nearby. It was not an opportunity she could have expected. Her gratitude was expressed in her gift. It is an early indication of her generosity of spirit.<sup>12</sup>

On February 11, 1805, Janey gave birth to her son Jean Baptiste. "Her labour was tedious and the pain violent," wrote Lewis. It was her first child and she was only sixteen or seventeen years old. A Frenchman at the fort suggested a remedy: the rattle of a rattlesnake, broken into small pieces and administered in a glass of water. Lewis gave him the rattle, perhaps wondering what his own mother, a noted herbalist, would think! "Whether this medicine was truly the cause or not I shall not undertake to determine," he wrote, "but I was informed that she had not taken it more than ten minutes before she brought forth...."<sup>13</sup>

A month later the captains caused a brief management-labor conflict when they discussed with Charbonneau the details of the duties he was expected to perform. As an interpreter his monthly salary would be \$25.00, five times what a private was paid. It was only reasonable and certainly consistent with their policy of no special privileges that Charbonneau would perform his share of such routine responsibilities as guard duty. But Janey's husband believed that he and his wife were so important to the Expedition that he was in a position to dictate his own terms of service. No guard duty for Charbonneau! In addition, Charbonneau demanded the rights to help himself to provisions as he pleased and to quit and return home if anyone said or did anything he didn't particularly like. Fine, said Lewis and Clark, pack up your lodge and your family and clear out. We'll hire someone else who can agree to our terms. That's exactly what they did.



*Minitari Scalp Dance. During her years at Knife River, some of the scalps Janey Charbonneau saw were those of friends and relatives among the Lemhi Shoshone.*

Charbonneau came back four days, apologized, and was re-hired. Lewis and Clark believed that Charbonneau had been "corrupted" by agents of the North West Company.<sup>14</sup>

The prevailing stereotypes of Charbonneau as the bumbling idiot and Janey as the savior of the Expedition are of course exaggerated. But some journal entries written during the first few months of the Corps' renewed voyage up the Missouri River in 1805 do convey that impression. Janey had learned a great deal from Shoshone and Hidatsa women about harvesting roots and berries. And when she noticed that Clark and Lewis were interested in learning about new plants and animals, she brought them specimens and told them what she knew about them. Private Joseph Whitehouse, for example, wrote on April 29th that she had informed them that bighorn sheep were "very common" in the Rocky Mountains.<sup>15</sup> A day later she showed Clark a species of currant that was also found in her homeland.<sup>16</sup>

On May 9th, Charbonneau the French chef prepared one of his specialties: boudin blanc. A bison Lewis shot provided all the necessary ingredients for Charbonneau sausage. The casing was a piece of large intestine six feet long from which Charbonneau squeezed out almost all of, well, never mind. Charbonneau then prepared a mixture of finely chopped meat, suet, salt, pepper, and flour. Without washing the intestine first Charbonneau tied one end and stuffed it as full as possible from the other. That completed, he tied



the other end. In Lewis's words, "it is then baptized in the Missouri with two dips and a flirt, and bobbed into the kettle; from whence, after it be fried with bears oil until it becomes brown...."<sup>17</sup> Even two hundred years ago, sausage was better if you didn't know what was in it.

Much of the time the Charbonneau family accompanied Clark on his walks along the Missouri River. At other times Charbonneau seemed determined to scuttle the Corps of Discovery's fleet. The mutual sharing of responsibilities on the Expedition sometimes backfired. Twice that spring Charbonneau was stationed at the tiller of a pirogue when it was struck suddenly by one of the gusts of wind common to the Missouri. When it happened on April 13th, Charbonneau turned the boat broadside to the wind rather than turn-

ing the bow into it, which is the proper position for craft from canoe to battleship. The wind on the sail rolled the pirogue over and almost capsized it before George Drouillard seized the tiller and turned the boat into the wind. A month later lightning struck again. Charbonneau, whom Lewis described as "perhaps the most timid waterman in the world," was again at the helm when a squall hit the pirogue. On board was some of the Corps' most precious cargo: records, books, trade goods, and medicine. Charbonneau panicked and once again swung the pirogue broadside to the wind, which of course caught the boat's sail. It listed heavily and began taking on water. While other crewmembers fought to take in the sail, Cruzatte, the Corps' lead boatman, threatened to shoot Charbonneau if he did not execute the requisite maneuver.



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This he did at last, but the boat was filled with water almost to the gunwales. The men rowed the pirogue to shore; others bailed the water out. Janey drew praise from the men for staying calm while her husband did not. Lewis reflected on the near disaster two days later. "The Indian woman," he wrote, "to whom I ascribe equal fortitude and resolution, with any person on board at the time of the accident, caught and preserved the most of the light articles which were washed overboard." It remains one of the enduring images of the Expedition: the Shoshone teenager calmly reaching out to pull in cargo as it floated by, baby on her back, and the water in the boat rising around her to an alarming level.<sup>18</sup> On May 20th, they paid tribute to Sacagawea "the Bird Woman" by naming a stream for her.<sup>19</sup>

On May 29th, just above the mouth of the Judith River, the Expedition came upon the former sites of two large Indian encampments, one on each side of the Missouri. In one of the camps alone they counted 126 fire rings. They appeared to have been there some two weeks before. Some moccasins were found at one of the camps. But when Janey saw them, according to Lewis, she "informed us that they were not of her nation the Snake Indians, but she believed they were of some of the Indians who inhabit the country on this side of the Rocky Mountains and North of the Missouri...." If Janey was right, then the Corps had probably missed an interview with the Blackfeet.<sup>20</sup>

Less than two months out from Ft. Mandan, it was apparent that Janey

had become a valued member of the Corps even if we consider only the contributions mentioned in the journals. Unfortunately, the journals are usually silent regarding the intangible qualities of personality and companionship. There is so much we would like to know but can only imagine through the lens of our individual notions. The men of the Corps, having begun to get accustomed to Janey, had occasion to contemplate what the rest of the Expedition might be like without her.

The first sign of trouble appeared on June 9 at Decision Point, the confluence of the Missouri and Marias Rivers. Both captains recorded in their journals that "Sah cah gah we a our Indian woman is very sick." There's no mention of the specific symptoms, but Clark applied one of the universal treatments of the time: he bled her, how much he did not record. Lewis had gone up the Missouri with a small party to search for the Great Falls. Fortunately, the Corps had jobs to do, including making a cache and stashing one of the pirogues, that made it possible for Janey to rest for several days.<sup>21</sup> Her treatment, such as it was, could proceed temporarily without the stress of travel. Clark bled her a second time on the 10th and again on the 11th, "which appeared to be of great service to her...."<sup>22</sup>

But Janey was much worse on the 12th, so much so that it was feared her life might be in danger. Nonetheless, the luxury of time was depleted. Clark and the rest of the Corps began to take the boats up the river that day. They placed Janey under the awning of the

remaining pirogue for protection from the sun and weather. Clark tried an unspecified "medison" on the 12th<sup>23</sup> and a "dose of salts" on the 13th<sup>24</sup> with no improvement. On the 15th Clark wrote that Janey was "Sick & low Spirited." He gave her a concoction of "bark" (Jesuit's bark or quinine) to drink and applied some to her lower abdomen, which had been causing her a great deal of pain. This "revived her much," but not for long.<sup>25</sup>

On the morning of the 16th, Clark described her as "verry bad." She refused to take any more medicine but Charbonneau finally prevailed upon her to do so when she was, in Clark's terms, "out of her Senses." When Lewis returned later that day, he was very alarmed at her condition for Janey herself, the nursing baby who would also perish for want of nutrition if his mother died, and for his hopes of a "friendly negociation" with the Lemhi Shoshones. She seemed to be near death. Her pulse was very weak and irregular. Lewis gave her another dose of quinine and some laudanum. He also sent for some water from a mineral spring he had discovered near the river. Soon her pulse became stronger and she felt considerable relief from the pain. After questioning her about her menstrual history, Lewis diagnosed an "obstruction of the menses in consequence of her taking could." She was still too ill to move and Lewis decided to remain camped where they were.<sup>26</sup>

Lewis continued the same treatment on the next day, the 17th, and was gratified to see her condition improve dra-



matically. She was even able to drink some broth and eat some broiled buffalo. By the 18th she was "free from fever and pain" and able to walk about for the first time in several days. On the 19th she felt much better and her appetite returned. Apparently with her husband's connivance, she violated Lewis's dietary instructions and suffered a relapse from over-indulging in roots and dried fish. Lewis "rebuked" Charbonneau and gave Janey a dose of laudanum for a sound night's sleep. Though still a little shaky, she felt well enough to go fishing on the 20th.<sup>27</sup> An infection or abscess seems a reasonable diagnosis. Her quick response to the mineral water suggests she was suffering from dehydration and a depletion of electrolytes.<sup>28</sup>

The time required for the long portage around the Great Falls gave Janey the leisure she needed to recover her strength. When the portage began on June 22nd, the Charbonneaus, Ordway, Goodrich, and York stayed behind.<sup>29</sup> On the 29th Clark and the Charbonneau family were walking along the portage route when a large dark cloud began to rise in the west. Dreading the prospect of being caught on the open plain by the rain, hail, lightning, and wind of a thunderstorm, they sought shelter under a rock shelf in a ravine. Apparently safe from the rain, they set their guns and packs down and prepared to wait out the storm. Janey placed Jean Baptiste at her feet. But the rain fell in torrents and the little party was in much greater danger than they realized.

Down the ravine came a wall of water, mud, and debris with such force that it threatened to engulf them before they could move: a flashflood. Charbonneau started up first, his wife behind him with their son in one arm and the other grasping for her husband. Pomp's clothing was swept away in the flood. By the time Clark had grabbed his rifle in his left hand and started up behind Janey, the water was up to his waist. He scrambled up the side of the ravine, pushing Janey with his right hand. Charbonneau, according to Clark, was "making attempts to pull up his wife by the hand much Scared and nearly without motion." They reached the plain above cold, wet, and exhausted to find York frantically searching for them. They walked back to camp, where Clark had them take "a little spirits...which revived very much." Clark feared Janey would suffer a relapse but this proved not to be the case. By the time the Corps had completed the portage around the Great Falls, her recovery seemed complete.<sup>30</sup>

When the Corps reached the area east of present day Helena, Janey realized she had been there before. "The Indian woman recognizes the country," wrote Lewis, "and assures us that this is the river on which her relations live, and that the three forks are no great distance."<sup>31</sup> The men were very heartened at the news and even more so when they reached the Three Forks on July 27th. Janey told them the story of her capture and showed them where the attack had happened. Lewis was somewhat surprised that he could discern in Janey no "sorrow in recollecting this

event, or of joy in being restored to her native country; if she has enough to eat and a few trinkets to wear I believe she would be perfectly content anywhere." It's a famous passage, one usually interpreted as condescending in tone. But it may also be the envious observation by a man driven to achieve of a young woman who had already learned the secret of happiness.<sup>32</sup>

Now that the Corps was near the Shoshone homeland, Clark and Lewis devised a strategy for contacting the Lemhi band. Lewis would assemble a small party to proceed on foot in advance of the boats to search for signs of the tribe. Janey's recognition of the large rock formation the Shoshones called the Beaverhead on August 8th that sent Lewis and his advance party on their way. "She assures us," wrote Lewis, "that we shall either find her people on this river [Beaverhead] or on the river [Lemhi] immediately west of its source; which from it's [sic] present size cannot be very distant."<sup>33</sup> A question naturally arises: why did Lewis not take Janey with him? We can only speculate. Lewis perhaps felt that she would have found it too difficult to keep up on the march. There was also some danger involved in the mission. She was too valuable to chance losing in a fight with a stray Blackfoot or Hidatsa war party.

So she remained with Clark and the boat party, who for another week struggled up what a rational person could never consider a navigable river. Everyone in the party wished Lewis good luck, for it would mean the end of



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the Missouri River at last. Janey walked along the river gathering ripe serviceberries. She was almost bitten by a rattlesnake.<sup>34</sup> And at supper on the 14th of August, her husband hit her. As Clark recorded it, "I checked our interpreter for striking his woman at their Dinner." The fact that it's mentioned at all in the journals indicates that it was an exception and not evidence of a pattern of physical abuse, something the other men of the Corps would not have tolerated.<sup>35</sup>

August 17th, 1805, may have been the happiest day of Janey's life. Lewis and his party had been gone about a week in their search for the Lemhi Shoshone. The rest of the Corps began that morning the last few miles of the Missouri River. On the 16th, scouts had seen the forks of the Beaverhead and had reported to Clark that neither fork would admit their dugout canoes.<sup>36</sup> On the morning of the 17th the Charbonneaus walked toward the forks; Clark followed them at some distance. They had walked about a mile when Clark saw Janey and Toussaint dancing "for the joyfull Sight" of several Lemhi Shoshones approaching on horseback. Looking back at Clark, she sucked on the fingers of one hand and pointed to the Indians to show that these were her people.<sup>37</sup>

The Shoshones had ridden down from the forks, where Lewis's party and about twenty Lemhis had camped.<sup>38</sup> They were as excited as Janey was to see that Lewis had been telling the truth about his boat party and had not after all led them into a trap. When

Janey reached the camp at the forks, she saw that there were only two Shoshone women with Lewis. But one of them was one of the girls who had been captured by the Hidatsa at the same time Janey had been and had later escaped and returned home. A mere coincidence seems unlikely when all the Lemhi but for these two had been too afraid to go with Lewis. Imagine this woman's thoughts when Lewis, through Drouillard, told the Shoshone that he was traveling with a Lemhi woman who had been captured by the "Pahkees" several years before at the Forks of the Missouri. Their reunion was, wrote Lewis, "really affecting."<sup>39</sup>

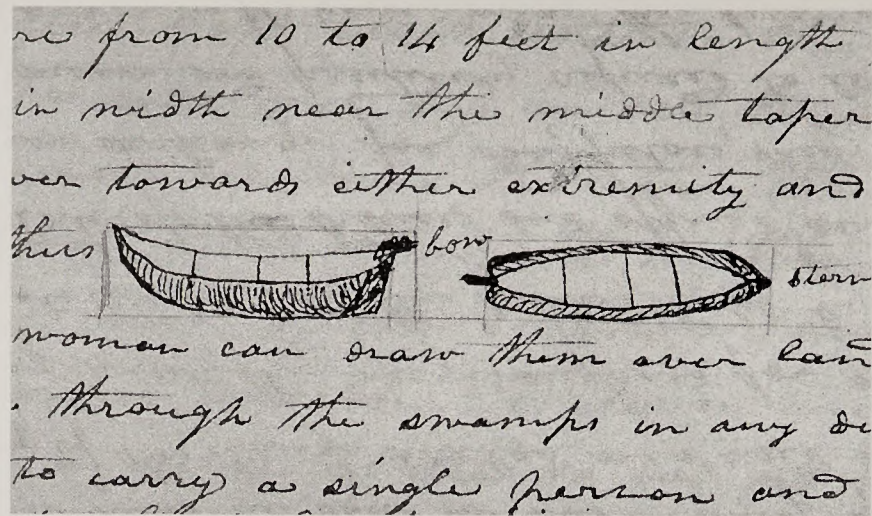
The men, in the meantime, made preparations for a council. Janey was called over to interpret, but before she began she looked at the Lemhi chief, Cameahwait. He was, she suddenly realized, her own brother. She embraced him, threw her blanket over him, and wept tears of joy. It is one of the great moments in our history. Through the medium of the journals we are invited to the climax of a miracle for a young woman who several months before could not have dared to dream she would ever see her Shoshone loved ones again. In time she regained some composure and the counsel began. But her emotions were too strong and several times she began crying again. But what a bittersweet homecoming it was. She learned that of all her family, all but two brothers and her oldest sister's son had died since her abduction several years before. The man to whom she had been promised as a young girl was still alive, but when

he discovered that she was married and had had a child, he relinquished his claim to her.<sup>40</sup>

With conflicting emotions Janey assumed her most important role for the expedition. Plans were made and quickly set in motion. Lewis and Clark decided that Clark would lead a small detachment of men back across the divide and conduct a reconnaissance of the Salmon River. Cameahwait had warned Lewis about the river, but finding a navigable river was so important that the captains were unwilling to dismiss it with anything less than eyewitness evidence. If it looked feasible, Clark would begin constructing canoes while Lewis directed the portage across the divide.<sup>41</sup>

The Charbonneau family would go with Clark's detachment and most of the Shoshones. It was Janey's responsibility to encourage her people to help the Corps pack their baggage across on Lemhi horses. It was a two day walk back to the Lemhi River and most of the Indians left Clark's detachment behind and hurried to the main camp to spread the good news. Cameahwait and several other men remained with Clark and the Charbonneaus. Late on the second day they stopped for the night about four miles short of the Lemhi encampment. That evening, according to Sgt. Patrick Gass, several more Lemhis rode up from the valley to meet them. There's no other information in the journals, but one can't help but think that here was another reunion between Janey and friends and relatives who did not





Lewis drew these sketches of the canoes that women along the Columbia River used to harvest wapato roots in ponds. Janey Charbonneau voted to spend the winter of 1805–6 at a site where there were “plenty of potas.”

want to wait one more night to see her.

When Clark left the Charbonneaus at the Lemhi camp on August 20th, they told him they would need only a day to organize the “relief mission.” They were true to their word. They, Cameahwait, and a large party of Lemhis returned to Lewis at Camp Fortunate before noon on the 22nd. Lewis and his men completed the repacking of the Corps’ baggage for horse transport and the combined parties got underway toward the divide on the 24th.

The arrival of the Expedition happened to coincide with the Lemhis’ imminent departure for the annual buffalo hunt on the Missouri River. By this time the salmon run was about over and the tribe was suffering from hunger. Cameahwait, who was responsible for his people, sent a messenger ahead to the camp on the Lemhi River telling the people there to hurry their departure. When Janey learned of her brother’s decision, she realized the problem it posed for the Expedition. Lewis had only been able to purchase by that time only about a dozen horses, less than half the number the Corps would need to haul their baggage should Clark’s reconnaissance prove that boating the Salmon River was out of the question.

Janey told her husband about this early on the morning of the 25th. But he waited until that afternoon to tell Lewis, who was naturally angry with Charbonneau and greatly alarmed at this information. With considerable skill and effort Lewis got Cameahwait

to countermand his instructions and fulfill his agreement to help the Corps across the divide.<sup>45</sup> They soon learned that Clark had found the river impassable. During the next few days Janey was in demand as an interpreter for negotiations over horses between Lewis and Clark and the Shoshone. On the 30th of August the last several horses were bought and loaded with baggage. The Corps of Discovery, guided by a Lemhi elder named Toby, headed north. Janey would interpret for Toby during the several weeks of hard travel across the Bitterroot Mountains of Montana and Idaho.<sup>46</sup>

As a Shoshone interpreter Janey’s services to the Expedition continued with other tribes after the Corps of Discovery left the Shoshone. When the Corps encountered the Montana Salish tribe on the east fork of the Bitterroot River near present day Sula, Montana, on September 4th, they found a Shoshone youth living with them.<sup>47</sup> He had learned enough of the Salish language to serve as a link in the complex translation sequence from Salish to Shoshone to Hidatsa to French to English. Lewis and Clark were thus able to transmit their standard diplomatic message to the Salish, learn what they could about this new tribe, and trade for several more horses. There is scant mention of the Charbonneau family during the crossing of the Lolo Trail in late September. Janey had her horse, but for much of the journey the way was too steep and/or snow and ice covered to permit riding. As for Charbonneau, we must imagine a man of forty-six

striving to keep up with men half his age.

By mid-October the Corps had been rescued by the Nez Perce and were on their way down the Snake River and Columbia River in new dugouts. And here Lewis and Clark realized that one of the most important gifts Janey had given the Expedition had been her presence. After encountering no Indians but the Shoshone on the Missouri, the Corps found the Snake and Columbia rivers relatively congested with many tribes. “The wife of Shabono our interpreter,” wrote Clark on October 13th, 1805, “reconciles all the Indians, as to our friendly intentions...a woman with a party of men is a token of peace.” It took some time to explain to Indians just exactly what they were up to, but at least with a woman and baby they had the opportunity to speak with Indians who otherwise may have been in fight or flight mode at the first appearance of the Corps.<sup>48</sup>

The Charbonneaus shared the excitement felt by the Corps as neared the Pacific. Charbonneau perhaps and Janey certainly had never seen an ocean. On the 21st of November Lewis and Clark met some Indians who would trade an otter skin robe, but were willing to take nothing but blue beads in exchange. Janey gave the officers a beaded belt she had to make the purchase.<sup>49</sup> It was an act of generosity typical of Janey. On a voyage where there was little room for extras, she nonetheless somehow managed to provide personal gifts: a small lump of sugar saved for her brother Cameahwait, a piece of



Below: Whale site where we  
 "...found only the Skeleton of  
 this Monster on the Sand...this  
 Skeleton measured 105 feet."  
 —William Clark, January 08, 1806



Right: "Janey" Charbonneau  
 recalled harvesting camas roots in  
 her childhood in Montana's Big  
 Hole, one of the few areas where  
 she actually served as a guide to  
 the Expedition.

bread and a Christmas present of  
 weasel tails for Clark.<sup>50</sup>

From the 1805–6 Ft. Clatsop winter  
 came some of the most endearing  
 images we have of Janey, including her  
 gifts to Clark. Perhaps the most memo-  
 rable occurred early in January when  
 word reached the fort that the carcass  
 of a whale had washed up on shore.  
 Clark made plans to take a detachment  
 to see the whale and perhaps obtain  
 some of its flesh. Clark had apparently  
 not planned on taking the Charbonneau  
 family. As a chastened Clark noted in  
 his journal on January 6th, they were  
 not happy at being left out:

*The last evening Shabono and his  
 Indian woman was very impatient  
 to be permitted to go with me, and  
 was therefore indulged; She  
 observed that She had traveled a  
 long way with us to see the great  
 waters, and that now that mon-  
 strous fish was also to be see, She  
 thought it verry hard that She  
 Could not be permitted to See  
 either (She had never yet been to  
 the Ocian.)<sup>51</sup>*

And here, perhaps, is a clue to the  
 question of why Janey chose to  
 continue on with the Corps rather  
 than remain behind with the Shoshone  
 in her homeland. Hired as an inter-  
 preter, she had become an explorer in  
 her own right.

On the return journey in 1806 a  
 Shoshone woman with the Walla Walla  
 tribe<sup>52</sup> and a Shoshone man living with  
 the Nez Perce put Janey again into the



role of interpreter and allowed Lewis  
 and Clark to learn more from the tribe  
 than they had the previous autumn.<sup>53</sup>  
 There was time enough to visit with the  
 Nez Perce because of the delay forced  
 upon the Corps by the need to wait for  
 enough snow to melt along the Lolo  
 Trail to permit travel. The "Long Camp"  
 of almost a month at present day  
 Kamiah was timely for Jean Baptiste,  
 who became very ill in mid-May. It  
 began with severe diarrhea and a high  
 fever. He then developed a large  
 swelling on his throat and neck. Lewis  
 treated the swelling with a poultice of  
 boiled onions and the diarrhea with  
 crème of tartar. Little Pomp, his  
 Shoshone name, suffered through sev-  
 eral more miserable days but in a  
 week's time was doing much better.

It was during the return journey that  
 Janey aided the Expedition in the role  
 that mythology assigned her: the guide  
 for the Lewis and Clark Expedition.  
 During the celebration of the  
 Centennial of the Expedition, Janey was  
 "discovered" as a symbol for westward  
 expansion and the feminist movement.  
 The image of the Indian princess literal-  
 ly pointing the way for Lewis and Clark  
 endures in the popular mythology of  
 the Expedition. With few exceptions,  
 which shall be described, she was not a  
 guide. The other members of the Corps  
 of Discovery invariably found the  
 Missouri and Columbia Rivers every  
 morning precisely where they had left  
 them the night before. They seem also  
 to have successfully determined on a  
 daily basis which way was upstream,



which way was downstream, and which way they ought to go.

As for the mountains between the two rivers, her services as guide were not required on the outbound journey in 1805. Lewis did not need Janey to find Lemhi Pass and the Lemhi Shoshone. From the Lemhi valley to the Clearwater River the Corps was guided by "Old Toby," an older Lemhi Shoshone man who despite a couple of bad mistakes got the Corps through the mountains safely. But Toby has not captured the interest of many sculptors or illustrators. Nor have the Nez Perce men who guided the Corps on the eastward journey in 1806.

Janey was a useful to Clark as a guide during the return journey. When Lewis and Clark went their separate ways from Travelers' Rest in present day Lolo, Montana, Clark headed south toward the former site of Camp Fortunate at the forks of the Beaverhead. There he planned to recover the Corps' canoes from the beaver ponds they had been submerged in the year before. The boats deemed for service would be paddled downstream to meet Lewis's detachment at the Great Falls. When Clark's detachment reached the little valley at present day Sula, Montana, on the east fork of the Bitterroot River, they found the Indian trail that crossed the divide into the Big Hole. This discovery saved the detachment from a repetition in reverse of the harrowing passage of Lost Trail Pass.

Before Clark's party entered the Big Hole, Janey began to recognize the

country. The stream they were following, she told Clark was a tributary of Jefferson's River. As a child she had come to the Big Hole with her family to dig camas. She also remembered a shortcut to the forks of the Beaverhead. She told Clark that when they reached "the higher part of the plain we would discover a gap in the mountains in our direction to the canoes." Janey pointed the gap out to Clark when it came within view.<sup>55</sup>

A week later Clark's party reached the forks of the Missouri, where they split into two detachments. Ordway and one squad took the canoes down the Missouri to meet Lewis. Clark, guided by Janey, went east to the Yellowstone. "The Indian woman who has been of great Service to me as a pilot through this Country recommends a gap in the mountains more South which I shall cross," wrote Clark.<sup>56</sup> Janey guided Clark to Bozeman Pass and an easy crossing to the upper Yellowstone River. She had remembered buffalo hunting trips to the Yellowstone, where the Lemhis sometimes hunted in league with the Crows. Janey's service as guide had a common theme: she recalled very well how to get to and from places her people went to harvest food. Clark's detachment built canoes and proceeded down the Yellowstone River in late July. On July 25th they stopped to climb a "very remarkable rock" downstream from present day Billings, Montana. Clark's party found petroglyphs and rock mounds. Clark carved his name on the rock, which he named "Pompey's Pillar."<sup>57</sup>

In mid-August the Corps reached the

villages of the Hidatsa and Mandans at the Knife River where they had spent the winter of 1804-5. Charbonneau went out to visit old friends and learn what had happened during his absence. He returned with sad news. The Hidatsas, despite their lip service to the peace talk of Clark and Lewis, had sent a raiding party against the Shoshone after the Corps had started up the Missouri in April 1805. The Hidatsas had lost two men, but Cameahwait's Lemhis had been "routed." Janey's reaction to this information went unnoticed or un-recorded.<sup>58</sup>

None of the Hidatsa chiefs accepted Clark's invitation to travel with the Corps to St. Louis and then on to Washington, D.C. to meet President Jefferson. One Mandan chief, Sheheke or "Big White" was willing to go, but he would take his own interpreter.<sup>59</sup> The Corps of Discovery had no further need for the services of the Charbonneaus. Clark had grown very fond of the family. Three days after leaving them behind, Clark wrote a letter to Charbonneau that counters to some degree the prevailing negative persona writers have created for the Frenchman over the last two hundred years.

*You have been a long time with me and have conducted your Self in Such a manner as to gain my friendship, your woman who accompanied you that long dangerous and fatiguing rout to the Pacific Ocean and back diserved a greater reward for her attention and services than we had in our power to give her at the Mandans.*



*As to your little son (my boy Pomp) you well know my fondness for him and my anxiety to take and raise him as my own child....*

*Charbono, if you wish to live with the white people, and will come to me I will give you a piece of land and furnish you with horses cows & hogs. If you wish to visit your friends in [Montreal] I will let you have a horse, and your family shall be taken care of until your return. If you wish to return as an Interpreter for the Menetarras.... I will procure you the place—or if you wish to return to trade with the Indians and will leave your little son Pomp with me, I will assist you with merchandize for that purpose....*

*Wishing you and your family great success & with anxious expectations of seeing my little dancing boy Baptiest I shall remain your Friend,  
William Clark<sup>60</sup>*

History loses track of the Charbonneaus for several years following the Expedition. If Toussaint decided to accept Clark's offer, there is no record of it. The best guess is that the Charbonneaus remained at the Knife River villages, where Charbonneau continued to make a living through trade and interpreting. On March 3, 1807, Congress voted to award land grants to the members of the Corps of Discovery, 1600 acres to Clark and Lewis, 320 acres to the other men, including Charbonneau.<sup>61</sup> It's not known when

Charbonneau learned about the land grant, but it seems to have led him to decide to travel down the Missouri to St. Louis. In 1809 a combined party of soldiers and agents of the Missouri Fur Company returned the Mandan chief Sheheke to his home. Pierre Choteau of St. Louis was on the mission. In a report to Secretary of War William Eustis, Choteau referred to "a white man who resides at the Mandan Village." This may have been Charbonneau. It's possible that the Charbonneau family returned to St. Louis with Choteau's party in the autumn of 1809.<sup>62</sup> One way or another, to St. Louis they came.

In St. Louis in January 31, 1810, Charbonneau cashed in a warrant for a portion of the wages he and his wife had earned during the Expedition. On December 7, 1810, Charbonneau was awarded a deed to a tract of land on the Missouri River north of St. Louis. But on March 26th, 1811, he sold the land to Clark for \$100. A week later, the Charbonneaus, minus Jean Baptiste, who apparently remained with Clark, were on their way home.<sup>63</sup>

They traveled aboard a keelboat belonging to the fur trader Manuel Lisa. Henry Brackenridge, an American journalist, was also on board. Brackenridge's *Journal of a Voyage up the Missouri River* in 1811 was published in Pittsburgh in 1814. Brackenridge's entry for April 2 includes the following:

*We have on board a Frenchman named Charbonet, with his wife, an Indian woman of the Snake*

*nation, both of whom accompanied Lewis and Clark to the Pacific, and were of great service. The woman, a good creature, of a mild and gentle disposition, was greatly attached to the whites, whose manners and airs she tries to imitate; but she had become sickly and longed to revisit her native country; her husband also, who had spent many years amongst the Indians, was become weary of a civilized life."<sup>64</sup>*

The Lisa party returned to St. Louis in the fall of 1811, but it is not known if the Toussaint and Janey Charbonneau returned to winter in St. Louis or remained on the upper Missouri. In 1812 Lisa hired Charbonneau as a Hidatsa interpreter. Lisa's 1812 expedition built Ft. Manuel on the Missouri River near the site of present Kenel, South Dakota.<sup>65</sup> John Luttig, a clerk, kept a journal of the 1812 expedition that contains several references to Charbonneau. On September 17th Indians drove off a number of Lisa's horses. Charbonneau and another engage named Jessaume went out to recover them and returned in early October with three. Trouble was brewing along the Missouri that fall.<sup>66</sup>

As old hands on the Missouri, Charbonneau and Jessaume indulged themselves in the sport of terrifying the greenhorns. Luttig wrote on October 9th:

*Charbonneau and Jessaume Keep us in Constant uproar with their Histories wild story telling and wish to make fear among the*





*Engagees, these two Rascals ought to be hung for their perfidy, they do more harm than good to the American Government, stir up the Indians and pretend to be friends to the white People at the same time....*<sup>67</sup>

The testimony of some Arikaras who arrived at the fort from their nearby village the next day further soured Luttig's views of Charbonneau. The Arikaras called him a liar who couldn't be trusted. Several days later Lisa sent Charbonneau and two other men on a diplomatic mission to the Hidatsas. They returned a week later—"our Heroes" Luttig called them—having brokered a peace with the Arikaras. On October 30th, Charbonneau and four Arikara warriors left to take a peace pipe to the Hidatsas. They returned on the 13th of November, accompanied by several Hidatsa leaders. But word arrived the next day that the Arikaras were preparing to attack the fort. Charbonneau, the Hidatsas and two other men went to the Arikara village and quieted them down for the time being.<sup>68</sup>

The weather at the fort on December 20th was clear and moderate, a fine day for the place and season. But the day ended in a grief:

*This Evening the Wife of Charbonneau a Snake Squaw, died of a putrid fever she was a good and the best woman in the fort, aged abt 25 years she left a fine infant girl.*<sup>69</sup>

A "putrid fever." Had Janey's illness at

the Great Falls foretold her death? Had she contracted malaria during her time in St. Louis? Questions that must go unanswered for now, perhaps forever. It's not clear from Luttig's journal whether Charbonneau was at the fort when his wife died. Sometime afterward he went north to buy furs from the Hidatsa. He returned to Ft. Manuel in late February.<sup>70</sup>

Before he reached the fort, he was warned by some Cheyennes he met to be careful, Sioux were lurking nearby. The attack came on February 22. A man who was hauling hay across the frozen river was killed and butchered within view of the fort, which was surrounded by a war party of some four hundred Indians. They left late in the afternoon. Another attack on March 5th, 1813, resulted in the deaths of fifteen men, more than half the garrison of the fort. Lisa, Luttig, and the survivors abandoned the fort and fled down the river. With them went little Lisette Charbonneau, daughter of Toussaint and Janey, now under the guardianship of John Luttig. Her father had started for the Hidatsa village just before the final, devastating attack.<sup>71</sup>

Luttig and Lisette Charbonneau reached St. Louis in June 1813.<sup>72</sup> Luttig and other members of Lisa's party told Clark the details of the attack and of Janey's death the previous December. When six

months had passed and no word had been received of Charbonneau, it was assumed that he had also had perished at the hands of the Indians. The War of 1812 had begun and American/Canadian border was lethal. On August 13th, 1813, a court in St. Louis, under the presumption that they were now orphans, made John Luttig the legal guardian of Lisette and Jean Baptiste, who was now eight years old and attending primary school in St. Louis. Subsequently, the name "William Clark" was super-scribed over Luttig's.<sup>73</sup>

Toussaint Charbonneau had not been killed, though it's not certain when Clark and Jean Baptiste learned that the latter had not been orphaned. The fate of Lisette Charbonneau remains a mystery. The lack of evidence suggests she may have died in infancy.

Not everyone accepts the story that Janey died at Ft. Manuel. In fact, on the Wind River reservation in Wyoming you can see Sacajawea's grave. The alternative story of Janey's fate begins with the belief that it was Charbonneau's other Shoshone wife who died at the fort, not Janey. Many Shoshones believe that she left her husband and children and began what was left of a very long life with a sojourn among the Comanches, cousins of the Shoshones, in the southwest. She married and had another family there, but after several decades wandered to



Wyoming, where she lived among the Eastern Shoshones until her death in the late 1880s. Shoshones there claim to be her descendants.

Jean Baptiste Charbonneau remained in St. Louis to continue his education. While still in his teens, he apparently decided to head west to join his father. St. Louis was still the point of departure for trading expeditions up the Missouri, so there was plenty of activity to whet the appetite of any young man with a taste for adventure, let alone one with Baptiste's background. And with William Clark's recommendation and connections he would have had no trouble finding a position in the fur trade. In the summer of 1823, when he was eighteen, Baptiste was "discovered" by a German nobleman at a trading post near the mouth of the Kansas River in present day Kansas City, Kansas.<sup>74</sup>

Paul Wilhelm of Baden-Württemberg was one of the earliest and most intriguing European adventurers drawn to the American frontier in the 19th century. He was born in 1797 to Eugen Friedrich Heinrich, Duke of the German state of Wuerttemberg, and Duchess Louise, formerly Princess of Stolberg-Godern. Under the law of primogeniture Paul's older brother Eugen stood to inherit his father's title. The military was a common refuge for younger sons and in 1806 at age nine, when his future friend Baptiste was cutting his teeth, Paul was appointed a captain in the palace guard of his uncle, King Friedrich. But soldiering was not for Paul. At schools in Stuttgart and Tübingen, he devoted himself to the

natural sciences. Conceiving a desire to visit the wilds of North America to study flora and fauna and to collect specimens, he assembled books, instruments, and guns and in October 1822 sailed to America.<sup>75</sup>

Following his arrival at New Orleans, Paul Wilhelm explored the lower Mississippi and Ohio rivers before making his way to St. Louis. There he met William Clark, who in 1821 had begun his second appointment as Superintendent of Indian Affairs.<sup>76</sup> Clark and the Choteau family helped Paul Wilhelm make arrangements for the trip up the Missouri River that led to his encounter with Jean Baptiste Charbonneau on June 21, 1823, at the mouth of the Kansas River:

*Here I also found a youth...whose mother, a member of the tribe of Sho-sho-nes, or Snake Indians, had accompanied the Messrs. Lewis and Clarke, as an interpreter, to the Pacific Ocean in 1804 to 1806. This Indian woman married the French interpreter, Toussaint Charbonneau, who later served me in the capacity of interpreter.<sup>77</sup>*

Jean Baptiste accepted Paul's invitation to travel with him to Germany when he had concluded his exploration of the Missouri River.

Two months later Paul Wilhelm met Baptiste's father at a Missouri Fur Company trading post at the confluence of the Missouri and White rivers in present day South Dakota. Charbonneau was sixty-five years old

and still working as an interpreter.<sup>78</sup> In the fall Paul Wilhelm returned down the Missouri and on October 9th stopped at the Kansas River to pick up Baptiste Charbonneau.<sup>79</sup> They continued down the Missouri, reaching St. Louis on October 24th. On November 3rd they boarded the steamboat Cincinnati bound down the Mississippi River for New Orleans. But several days the boat sank when a snag rammed its hull.<sup>80</sup>

Baptiste and Paul returned to St. Louis and secured passage on the steamboat Mandan, which started for New Orleans on December 5th and arrived on the 19th.<sup>81</sup> On Christmas Eve they set sail from New Orleans on the brig Smyrna, bound for France. The boy who had crossed the Bitterroots on his mother's back was introduced to the North Atlantic in winter. In Paul's words:

*...the sea fought us with huge waves, and the ship was tossed about so violently that the rolling action became unbearable. The waves struck with such force over board that part of the railing was shattered. Water barrels and other gear were washed into the sea and it was almost impossible to remain on deck...the cold had risen to a most painful stage. The thermometer sank to between 5 degrees and zero, hail and snow skiffs filled the air, and in between there was occasional lightning and thunder. The creaking of the masts, the whistling in the storm-torn rigging, the heavy pounding of the waves, the eternal rocking of the boat, and the vast quantities*



*of water that penetrated through the door of the cabin made the situation exceedingly unpleasant.*<sup>82</sup>

During the next six years, Baptiste Charbonneau experienced a lifestyle far removed from what he had known before. He accompanied Paul Wilhelm from castle to castle, palace to palace, and court to court. Paul had become addicted to travel and Baptiste his chosen companion. On April 17, 1827, Paul Wilhelm married Princess Sophie Dorothea Caroline von Thurn und Taxis.<sup>83</sup> The couple was given the former castle of the German Order of Knights at Bad Mergentheim as their residence.

Both Jean Baptiste and Paul Wilhelm fathered children in Bad Mergentheim.<sup>84</sup> The mother of Jean Baptiste's son and Janey's grandson was Anastasia Katharina Fries, the daughter of a German soldier. Jean Baptiste and Anastasia were not married. Their son, Anton, was born on February 20th, 1829, and died on May 15th of the same year. For three months, Janey had a grandson. Paul Wilhelm's son Maximilian was legitimate, but by the time he was born the marriage of his royal parents had soured and the couple had separated.<sup>85</sup>

In 1829 Paul and Baptiste returned to the United States. After several months in the Caribbean, they landed at New Orleans and arrived at St. Louis in December. On December 23rd they started up the Missouri. They reached Ft. Union at the mouth of the Yellowstone in May, 1830. Paul's written account of his second trip to America

has disappeared, a great loss considering the quality of his book describing his first voyage and what little we do know about the second. One reference in Paul's journal for his 1851 American voyage is particularly intriguing:

*Twenty years ago when I was coming from the Rocky Mountains in my pirogue and stopped here [Lexington, Missouri] to buy flour, there had been only a few houses. At that time I had a remarkable tame eagle which had accompanied me faithfully from the falls.*<sup>86</sup>

The only falls on the Missouri are the Great Falls in Montana and you haven't been in the Rocky Mountains unless you've gone beyond the falls. Two obscure sentences are the only known evidence of a great adventure: a German duke and "Pomp" Charbonneau on the upper Missouri with a pet eagle. Paul returned to St. Louis in late October, but Baptiste chose to remain in America.

It's possible that Baptiste was reunited with his father during his Missouri River expedition with Paul Wilhelm. During the 1820s and 1830s William Clark hired the elder Charbonneau as an Indian interpreter for the Army on the Missouri River. In this capacity he served such officers as General Henry Atkinson and Major Stephen Kearny. In the 1830s the American Fur Company hired him to interpret. During the winter of 1833–4 Toussaint served as interpreter for the German Prince Maximilian von Wied-Neuwied and the Prince's Swiss artist Karl Bodmer at the

American Fur Company's Fort Clark at the Mandan-Hidatsa villages. Maximilian noted in his journal that "This 75-year-old man is always running after women."<sup>87</sup>

William Clark's death in September 1838 deprived Toussaint Charbonneau of his job as an interpreter for the federal government. He was eighty years old. In the summer of 1839 Charbonneau traveled downriver to St. Louis to collect his last salary payment from Joshua Pilcher, who had succeeded Clark as Superintendent of Indian Affairs. Pilcher wrote to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs on August 26th, 1839 that Charbonneau

*"...came into the office, tottering under the infirmities of eighty winters, without a dollar to support him, to ask what appeared to me nothing more than just, and I accordingly have paid his salary as Interpreter for the Mandan sub-agency, for the 1st and 2d quarters of this year, with the understanding that his services are no longer required. This man has been a faithful servant of the government—though in a humble capacity. He figured conspicuously in the expedition of Lewis and Clark to the Pacific, and rendered much service."*<sup>88</sup>

Pilcher's words may serve as an epitaph for Toussaint Charbonneau, who at this point vanishes from the historical record. When and where he died is not known with any certainty. The Lewis and Clark "conventional



wisdom" has labeled Charbonneau as a disreputable, cowardly, incompetent, abusive pedophile in a mythology that demands a villain. At best he is seen as comic relief for those who like to laugh at others. Charbonneau, of course, did not record his own story for posterity. But he was William Clark's friend. And no one could dispute that he was a survivor.

Sometime during the summer of 1830, Jean Baptiste Charbonneau parted with Paul Wilhelm of Würtemberg and got a job as a trapper with the American Fur Company.<sup>89</sup> Despite his education and experience abroad, Pomp would be a mountain man. He was no more fit for the parlor than Huck Finn. Unlike others with his "half breed" background who became trapped between two worlds, neither welcome nor at home in either, Baptiste seems to have had the ability to adapt to whatever company in which he found himself. During the next sixteen years he ranged the Rockies from Montana to New Mexico, associating with the likes of Joe Meek, Jim Bridger, John Charles Fremont, and Thomas Fitzpatrick. Trapper/author Rufus Sage met Baptiste on the South Platte River in 1842:

*The camp was under the direction of a half-breed, named Charbonard, who proved to be a gentleman of superior information. He had acquired a classic education and could converse quite fluently in German, Spanish, French, and English, as well as several Indian languages. His mind, also, was well stored with choice read-*

*ing, and enriched by extensive travel and observation.... There was a quaint humor and shrewdness in his conversation, so garbed with intelligence and perspicuity, that he at once insinuated himself into the good graces of his listeners, and commanded their admiration and respect.<sup>90</sup>*

In 1846 Army hired Charbonneau to shepherd the "Mormon Battalion of Infantry Volunteers" from Santa Fe, New Mexico, to San Diego, California, during the Mexican War. Baptiste joined the battalion, which was commanded by Regular Army officer Lt. Col. Philip St. George Cooke, on October 24th. There was no easy passage yet through southern New Mexico, Arizona, and California, Cooke was at liberty to improvise. Baptiste's role, as recorded in Cooke's journal, was to range ahead of the column and search out water and grass for the stock. He also took advantage of the opportunity to trap and hunt.<sup>91</sup>

When the battalion reached the coast in January 1847, Baptiste was hired as an administrator at the mission San Luis Rey. His responsibility was to see that the Indians at the mission were treated well. He seems to have taken his duty to serve as an advocate seriously, for before long he was accused taking their side to an inconvenient degree. After eight months he resigned, having had his fill of politics.<sup>92</sup> By that time the news of the discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill in central California had reached San Diego. Baptiste rode north to the "diggings." In the fall of 1848 a

friend from his trapping days, Jim Beckwourth, found Baptiste on the Middle Fork of the American River.<sup>93</sup>

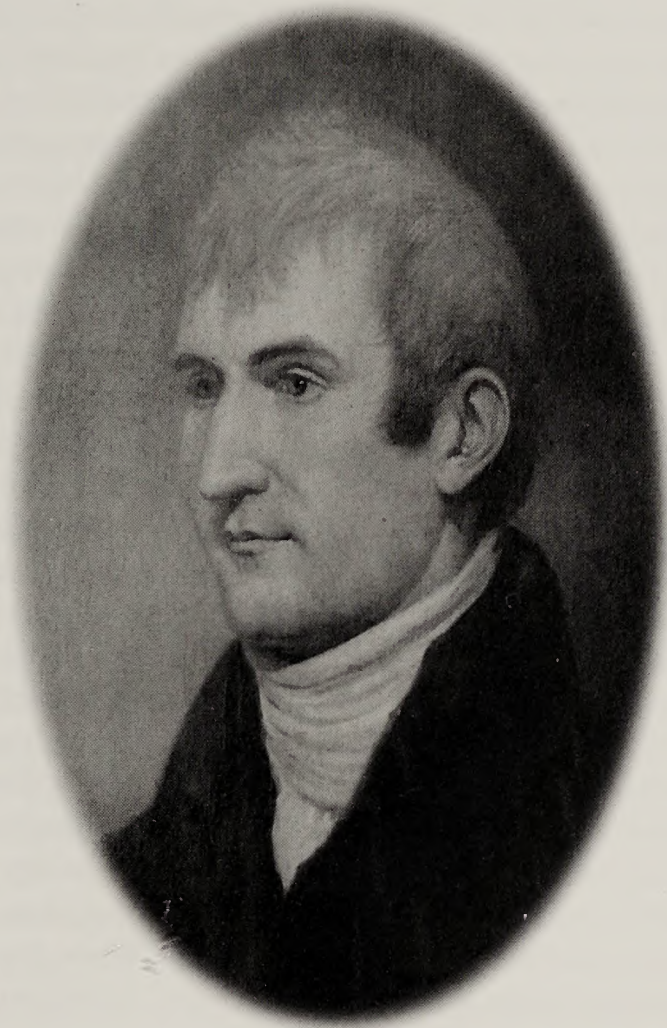
Baptiste is believed to have spent the next eighteen years in the California mining camps, but he left little trace of his activities there. In 1866 he was working as a hotel clerk in Auburn when news of a rich strike in Montana arrived. With two companions Baptiste made plans to head for the Rockies. In mid-May they forded the swollen Owyhee River in southeastern Oregon. Shortly thereafter Baptiste fell ill and died on May 16th, probably of pneumonia at a ranch and stage station. He was buried nearby. Baptiste was sixty-one years old.<sup>94</sup>





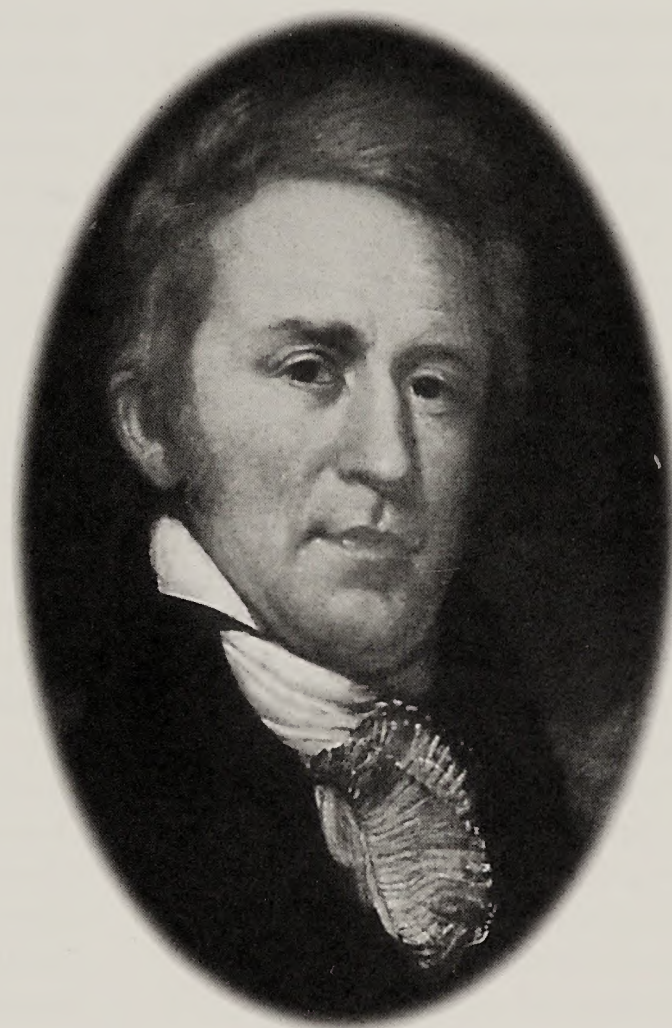


# 19 Meriwether Lewis and William Clark



*Above: Meriwether Lewis by  
Charles Wilson Peale (1807)*

*Opposite: William Clark by  
Charles Wilson Peale (1810)*



Lewis and Clark. Their names are forever linked. If they have become a cliché to the uninitiated, it is because they fulfilled their mission of exploration so well that their achievements spawn more admiration than controversy. The more one learns about the Expedition, the more one must marvel at their rare partnership. Co-commanders of a platoon? An infantry captain insisting that knowledge of his companion's lower rank would be withheld from his men, that they would regard them as equals? Never mind; it worked.

William Clark and Meriwether Lewis share family backgrounds similar in

class and geography but different in relationships. Clark is the older man. He was born on August 1, 1770, the ninth of ten children born to John and Ann Rogers Clark. William Clark's parents were from the same Albemarle County that was home to the Lewis and Jefferson families. But in 1754 they moved east to a farm near present day Partlow, Virginia, to raise their large family.<sup>1</sup>

Meriwether Lewis was four years younger than his friend Clark, young enough to allow a form of hero worship when they became friends. Lewis was born on August 18, 1774, at Locust Hill,



a farm seven miles west of Charlottesville, Virginia. His parents, William Lewis and Lucy Meriwether, were both the offspring of prominent families. One sister, Jane, had preceded him. A brother, Reuben, was born in 1777.<sup>2</sup>

A tradition of military service was common to the Clark and Lewis families. Wars with Indians, French and British in the 18th Century required several generations of fathers and sons to protect their families and communities. Lewis's father William served first in the Virginia militia and during the Revolution was an officer in the Continental Army.<sup>3</sup> Clark's older brother was George Rogers Clark. A bold commander, Clark conquered and held the Old Northwest for the United States during the Revolution in a series of brilliant campaigns. The Clark brothers John, Richard, and Edmund also served their country.<sup>4</sup>

In 1779 Lt. William Lewis died of pneumonia. Meriwether was only five years old. As the oldest son under the law of primogeniture, Meriwether legally inherited the title to his father's farm. Until Meriwether came of age, his uncles would manage Locust Hill. The widowed Lucy Lewis married Captain John Marks in 1780 and the family soon moved to Georgia.<sup>5</sup> There as a young boy Meriwether Lewis learned the woodsman's skills that he would seek in the men who would serve in the Corps of Discovery. In a memoir he wrote of Lewis in 1813, Thomas Jefferson recalled that:

*When only eight years of age he*

*habitually went out, in the dead of night, alone with his dogs, into the forest to hunt the raccoon and opossum.... In this exercise no season or circumstance could obstruct his purpose—plunging through the winter's snows and frozen streams in pursuit of his object.<sup>6</sup>*

In 1787, at the age of twelve, Lewis returned to Locust Hill. He pursued formal education under a succession of private tutors and schoolmasters of in the Charlottesville area. One of his schoolmates later described the teenaged Lewis:

*He was always remarkable for perseverance, which in the early period of his life seemed nothing more than obstinacy in pursuing the trifles that employ that age; of a martial temper and great steadfastness of purpose, self-possession and undaunted courage. His person was stiff and without grace; bowlegged, awkward, formal and almost without flexibility.<sup>7</sup>*

Lewis's formal education was curtailed by the death of his stepfather in 1791. At seventeen Lewis was the legal head of the family, responsible for Locust Hill, his mother, brother, sister, and the two children born to his mother and Captain Marks. His responsibilities also included the twenty or so slaves owned by the family and other scattered properties in addition to the two thousand acres at Locust Hill.<sup>8</sup> In 1792 Lewis traveled to Georgia to help move the family back to Locust Hill.

A comparison of the writing in their Expedition journals is ample evidence that William Clark's formal education was not as thorough as Lewis's. He had the advantage, however, of a large and stable family, one that included both parents, a table full of siblings, and several slaves. When the Revolutionary War ended, George Rogers Clark chose to remain in the western territory he helped win. Brother Jonathan soon joined him. Their entreaties and enthusiasm for the Kentucky frontier eventually won their parents, who decided to go west.

In 1784 the Clarks sold their Virginia home. They made it as far as Pittsburgh, where they spent the winter before going down the Ohio to the "falls" at present day Louisville and their new farm, Mulberry Hill. William Clark was fifteen, the perfect age for adventure. In the late 1780s war broke between the settlers and Indians. William Clark joined the Kentucky militia and at the ripe old age of nineteen discovered that he had a knack for commanding men. In January 1790 he was promoted to Captain of Militia at Clarksville, Indiana Territory, just across the Ohio River from Louisville.<sup>9</sup>

Clark described the next stage in his military career in a letter to Nicholas Biddle in 1811:

*In March 1791 I was appointed a Lieut. In [General Anthony] Waynes army and was kept on Command about 18 months before I joined the Main Army. When I joined, I was annexed to a Chose*



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*Rifle Company of which I had the Command, and received a Staff appointment, both of which I retained until after the Treaty of Greenville....*<sup>10</sup>

Clark's staff appointments were to the positions of adjutant and quartermaster.<sup>11</sup> He fought in several campaigns against the Indians under General Wayne, including the battle of Fallen Timbers in August 1794. The Greenville Treaty Clark referred to was negotiated in 1795 and established temporary boundaries between Indian lands and land opened for settlement.<sup>12</sup> Later that year, a fiery young lieutenant was transferred to Clark's company. While "under the influence," Lieutenant Meriwether Lewis had insulted a fellow officer. A court-martial acquitted Lewis, but all the same it was decided that a transfer would be prudent.<sup>13</sup>

Managing a Virginia estate was not to be Lewis's fate. The Whiskey Rebellion of 1794 gave him an opportunity to make his contribution to defending the "domestic tranquility" of the nation. Farmers in western Pennsylvania had risen in protest over the federal excise tax levied on whiskey. President George Washington summoned an army of 13,000 militiamen to squelch the rebellious farmers who distilled whiskey for a cash crop. Meriwether Lewis joined the Virginia militia as a private. The approach of the army ended the rebellion. It also marked a life change for Lewis, who found the adventure of soldiering more to his taste than life as a country squire.<sup>14</sup>

Lewis's rise in rank paralleled that of Clark. After spending the winter with the army in Pennsylvania, he was promoted to ensign and then transferred from the militia to the Regular Army in 1795.<sup>15</sup> His military career almost came to a sudden, disgraceful end in November because of the incident described above.

The first phase of their friendship came to an early end in July 1796. Poor health and the pressing demands of family business forced Clark to resign his commission and return to Mulberry Hill.<sup>16</sup> His brother George Rogers Clark had received from his country only a large debt for his services to it during the Revolution. He had spent his own funds to buy necessary supplies for his troops, money that was never repaid.<sup>17</sup> Between 1796 and 1803, William Clark traveled extensively in the Ohio and Mississippi valleys and to the Eastern seaboard in his efforts to salvage his older brother's financial affairs. William's mother died in 1798.<sup>18</sup> When his father John died in July 1799, William inherited Mulberry Hill, but he was forced to sell it to his brother Jonathan to raise capital. By December 1802 he had moved across the Ohio River to live with brother George in Clarksville, Indiana.<sup>19</sup>

Lewis remained in the Army. He was transferred to the 1st Infantry Regiment, promoted to lieutenant in 1799 and appointed regimental paymaster. The assignment gave Lewis the opportunity to travel throughout the trans-Appalachian territories by horse and by boat.<sup>20</sup> His knowledge of the

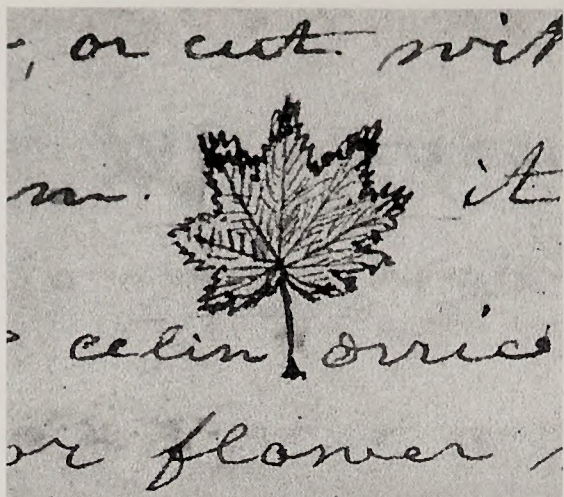
frontier was one of his many assets that in 1801 influenced Thomas Jefferson to appoint Lewis his personal secretary. Lewis received Jefferson's invitation at Pittsburgh. He replied:

*I most cordially acquiesce, and with pleasure accept the office, nor were further motives necessary to induce my compliance that that you Sir should conceive that in the discharge of the duties of that office, I could be servicable to my country, or ucefull to yourself....*<sup>21</sup>

Contemplating life in what would become known as the "Whitehouse" during the two years Lewis lived there with Thomas Jefferson is one of the sublime pleasures of American history. The house itself was still unfinished: cold, drafty, and sprawling.<sup>22</sup> Jefferson, a widower, had had but one son, who lived only three weeks in 1777. Lewis had lost both a father and a stepfather.<sup>23</sup> They were two bachelors in a house otherwise inhabited by a staff of servants. Lewis could not have had a better education at any college in the United States. The two men, acquaintances before, came to know each other well. Years later when Jefferson was asked to write a short "memoir" of Lewis, he stated that Lewis

*had from early life been subject to hypochondriac affections. It was a constitutional disposition in all the nearer branches of the family of his name, and was more immediately inherited by him from his father... While he live with me in Washington I observed at times*





The Expedition's primary botanist, Lewis introduced over a hundred new plants to the scientific world.

*sensible depressions of mind; but, knowing their constitutional source, I estimated their course by what I had seen in the family.*<sup>24</sup>

Considering the relatively primitive understanding of mental disorders of the time, Jefferson's observations were insightful. He was also aware that Lewis drank too much at times. Nothing in the symptoms Jefferson observed seems to have made him question Lewis's fitness to lead the Expedition. In the memoir cited above Jefferson described what he perceived were Lewis's unique qualifications:

*...intimate with the Indian character, customs, and principles; habituated to the hunting life; guarded by exact observation of the vegetables and animals of his own country, against losing time in the description of objects already possessed; honest, disinterested, liberal, of sound understanding, and a fidelity to truth so scrupulous that whatever he should report would be as certain as if seen by ourselves—with all these qualifications, as if selected and implanted by nature in one body for this express purpose....*<sup>25</sup>

Following Congressional approval of the Expedition, the pace of Lewis's education accelerated. Jefferson arranged private tutelage for Lewis with the best American scholars, including Robert Patterson, professor of mathematics at the University of Pennsylvania, to whom Jefferson wrote:

*If we could have got a person perfectly skilled in botany, natural history, mineralogy, astronomy, with at the same time the necessary firmness of body & mind, habits of living in the woods & familiarity with the Indian character, it would have been better. But I know of no such character who would undertake an enterprise so perilous.... He has been for some time qualifying himself for taking observations of longitude & latitude to fix the geographical points of the line he will pass over...and it is the particular part in which you could give him valuable instruction....*<sup>26</sup>

The Lewis and Clark Expedition was an astounding achievement, but it was preceded by and made possible by one just as phenomenal: Lewis's almost single-handed preparations for the Expedition in 1803. These involved not just consultation and instruction with Patterson and other authorities. Lewis had to decide what he would need to outfit the Expedition—food, clothing, medicine, weapons, transportation, etc.—he was faced with purchasing it, gathering it, and arranging for shipment to the point of embarkation, Pittsburgh. Imagine yourself responsible for outfitting a camping trip of three years for over thirty people, and you have no faster means of communication than a letter carried by horse.

Clark was at Clarksville, Indiana in July 1803 he received Lewis's invitation to join him as co-commander of the Corps of Discovery.<sup>27</sup> By late August Lewis had

contrived to assemble at Pittsburgh what he needed to begin the Expedition. On October 15th, he reached Clarksville, the home of his friend and co-commander. As Stephen Ambrose wrote in *Undaunted Courage*, "When they shook hands, the Lewis and Clark Expedition began."<sup>28</sup> Until that moment, Lewis had done an admirable job on the Lewis Expedition.

Here began a partnership unparalleled in Army history. Lewis was determined that Clark would be his co-commander, equal in rank, authority and responsibility. From the beginning Clark was addressed as "Captain." Clark's actual commission did not reach him until May 6, 1804, just a few days before the Expedition headed upriver. The Army appointed Clark a 2nd Lieutenant. Lewis's outrage was somewhat tempered by the concession that Clark would receive Captain's pay during the Expedition.<sup>29</sup>

As the Corps of Discovery neared St. Louis in the late autumn of 1803, Lewis sent Clark with the boats and recruits farther up the Mississippi to the mouth of Wood River, where Clark directed the construction of Camp Wood on the east shore of the Mississippi. Lewis was detained in St. Louis most of the winter in making final preparations for the Expedition, leaving Clark in command at Camp Wood. Clark deserves much of the credit for shaping the raw material of the individuals members of the Corps into a superb body of explorers. The difficulty of the task is indicated by the outbreaks of insubordination that occurred at Camp Wood, particularly



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*Meriwether Lewis pauses to reflect while writing in his journal. The chronological gaps in Lewis's journals, extending at times to several months, have puzzled historians.*

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when Clark was absent and Sgt. Ordway in command.

Once the Corps had gotten underway up the Missouri in May 1804, Lewis and Clark were "Co-Captains" to a degree that seems incredible. It was an arrangement that should not have worked, but it did. One will search the journals in vain for a hint that the two might have had any sort of major disagreement. Students of the Expedition have discussed how the two men differed in character but complemented each other so well, sometimes almost to the point of caricature: Lewis, the gifted but troubled genius, Clark the sturdy, easy-going frontiersman. This impression is partly derived from a comparison of their journals. Clark's quirky spelling and grammar are notorious, but add greatly to the charm of his journals. Clark's journals are a steady and consistent record of the Expedition, spanning the not infrequent gaps in Lewis's journals. During the Expedition, Clark was the chief surveyor and cartographer. The maps he drew are of uneven quality, at times very accurate, at times not too. But they are a priceless complement to the journals, particularly for those who delight in trying to determine a particular route or campsite used by the Corps.

The success of the Expedition is ample testimony to how well they did each job. Commanding a detachment the size of the Corps or even one smaller is a job in itself. No matter how self-motivated the members of the Expedition may have been at times, it is the skill of the officer that keeps them



doing their job when they would rather have done anything else. The physical, emotional, and mental stresses of the Expedition were extraordinary. It required truly gifted commanders to keep the Corps together, alive, and functional during the Expedition. But that was just one job. Every day of the Expedition, Clark and Lewis were also scientists fulfilling Thomas Jefferson's instructions to observe, measure, describe, and collect. There was so much that was new, and Jefferson's curiosity was insatiable!

Historians have given Lewis and Clark mixed reviews for their relations with the tribes. With the exception of the skirmish on the Marias River in 1806, they were generally peaceful. From his previous experience with Indians, Lewis had learned how to do business with them. He, more than Clark, had a tendency to lose his temper upon occasion. His best hour may have been the successful meeting with the Lemhi Shoshone in August 1805. For over two weeks Lewis, through interpreters, won

and kept the confidence of Cameahwait's wary and hunted band. Had Lewis failed, the Expedition could not have crossed the continental divide and established an American presence on the Pacific watershed.

The Corps' safe arrival in St. Louis on September 23, 1806, launched the first phase of the post-Expedition: several weeks of writing letters personal and official, completing journals, discharging and paying the men, and responding graciously to adulation. On October 10 Clark mailed his lieutenant's commission back to Secretary of War Henry Dearborn, it "having answered the purpose for which it was intended."<sup>30</sup> Clark, Lewis, and the other members of their entourage rode east on October 21st. Clark and York stopped to visit their families at Clarksville and Louisville before continuing on to Virginia and Washington, D.C. While in Virginia he stopped at Fincastle to "pay court" to young Julia or "Judith" Hancock.<sup>31</sup>

Lewis and his entourage reached Washington on December 28th, 1806.<sup>32</sup> They were subjected to numerous expressions of thanks and congratulations, but the most meaningful moments for Lewis went unrecorded. Once again he shared the Whitehouse with the President, who had been vindicated in his choice of Lewis as Expedition commander and now must know everything that had happened on the fateful voyage.<sup>33</sup>

At the same time Jefferson encouraged Lewis to waste no time in editing the journals he and Clark had kept during



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*Below: William Clark uses a sextant to measure the angle between the sun and the horizon. Clark and Lewis practiced celestial navigation for many hours before the Expedition began and were as faithful to their duty once the Corps of Discovery was underway.*

the Expedition for publication. As far as Jefferson was concerned, the Expedition would be incomplete until the body of knowledge it had collected was available to the public. Already there was cause for embarrassment in the announced plans for the forthcoming publication of the journals kept by Sgt. Patrick Gass and Private Robert Frazier.<sup>34</sup> In the spring of 1807 Lewis traveled to Philadelphia to see to the proper treatment of the many zoological and botanical specimens and Indian artifacts collected during the Expedition and to consult with printers regarding the preparation of the journals and Clark's maps for printing. And he apparently indulged in tentative courtships that led nowhere. Finally he found his way home to Virginia.<sup>35</sup>

Both Clark and Lewis were rewarded with large land grants, bonuses, and political office. Jefferson nominated and the Senate confirmed Lewis's appointment as Governor of Louisiana Territory.<sup>36</sup> On March 12th, 1807, Jefferson appointed Clark the superintendent of Indian affairs for Louisiana with the rank of brigadier general in the territorial militia.<sup>37</sup> Clark set out for St. Louis to assume his duties, stopping once again at Fincastle to visit Julia Hancock and at Louisville/Clarksville to visit family. When he reached St. Louis, he arranged the expedition commanded by Nathaniel Pryor that failed in its attempt to return the Mandan chief Sheheke home to his tribe. After he established himself in St. Louis, Clark returned to Fincastle, where he married Julia on January 5th, 1808.<sup>38</sup> By the time he returned to St. Louis in the

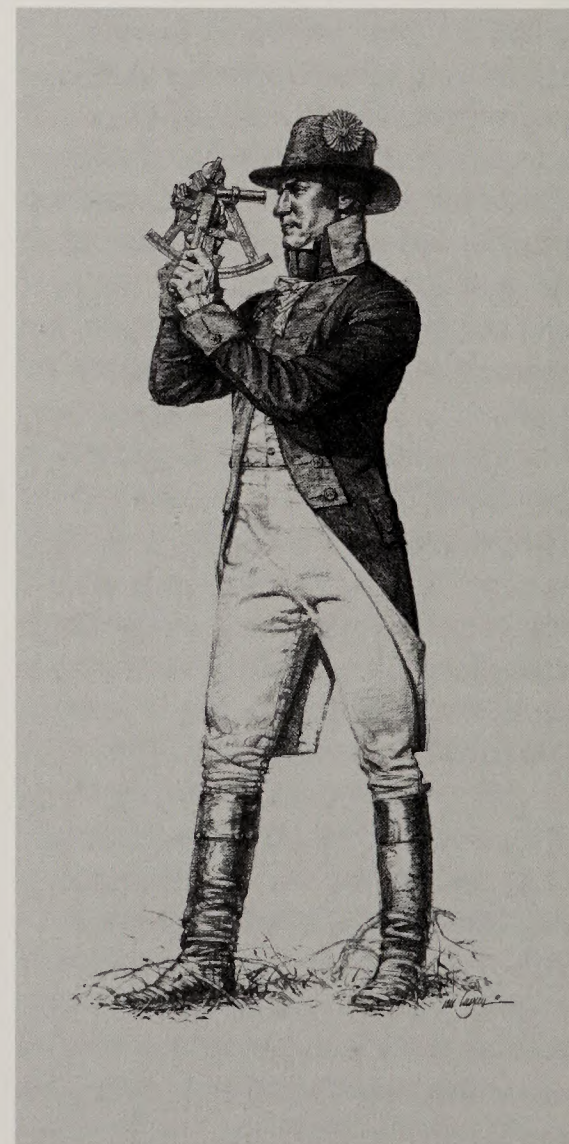
spring, Lewis had arrived to assume his official responsibilities. The Clarks' first child, Meriwether Lewis Clark, was born in St. Louis on January 10, 1809.<sup>39</sup>

Lewis applied himself conscientiously to his duties in St. Louis, but the responsibilities were many and the burdens great. A matter of great concern was the safe return of the Mandan chief Sheheke to his home, an effort the Arikaras had blocked with force in 1807. As part of that effort, Lewis lent his support to the Missouri Fur Company, which in exchange for trading concessions was willing to provide a strong escort party. Lewis found it necessary to make purchases for the expedition with vouchers, believing that the War Department would back them.<sup>40</sup>

But James Madison was now President, not Thomas Jefferson. Madison's Secretary of War, William Eustis, informed Lewis that the vouchers would not be honored. He considered Lewis personally responsible for a draft of \$500 he had written to buy presents for Indians. When Lewis's private creditors learned this, they demanded immediate payment.<sup>41</sup> He faced financial ruin. Several other factors complicated Lewis's situation. One was the bitter enmity that had developed between Lewis and Frederick Bates, his secretary. The evidence suggests that Bates used his influence to discredit Lewis in Washington.<sup>42</sup> Another was Lewis's procrastination toward the task of editing and preparing the journals for publication. Jefferson wrote letters to Lewis seeking information about the project. Lewis failed to answer.<sup>43</sup>

Lewis decided he must travel to Washington, D.C. and present his case. Clark agreed to go as well. He had had experience in precisely these sorts of problems through his support of his brother George Rogers Clark. He would go by land, Lewis by water. On September 4, 1809, Meriwether Lewis began his last voyage.<sup>44</sup>

Lewis's boat trip down the Mississippi was a nightmare. Aggravated by the extreme stress Lewis was experiencing, the hereditary clinical depression from





which Lewis suffered struck savagely. Probably suffering as well from the delirious fevers and chills of malaria, Lewis drank heavily, dosed himself with opium, and twice tried to kill himself. He wrote his last will and testament. At Ft. Pickering, present day Memphis, Tennessee, Lewis left the boat and was cared for by the fort's commander, Captain Gilbert Russell. When he had seemingly recovered, Lewis started east on horseback along the Natchez Trace. His servant, James Pernier, Major James Neelly, and Neelly's servant accompanied Lewis. When Neelly stayed behind to search for horses that had strayed on the 10th of October, Lewis rode ahead to Grinder's Inn, a crude way station. He died shortly after sunrise the next morning.<sup>45</sup>

The cause and circumstances of his horrible death are still debated: murder or suicide? We can never be certain. But those who have experienced untreated chronic, clinical depression will feel the cold sweat of recognition and ache of compassion when they read the account of his last hours. Jefferson had noted that depression was common in Lewis's family. There is a facet of clinical depression that seems unrelated to deep sadness. It resembles more the opposite: intense anxiety. At its worst, the victim experiences an irrational but nevertheless overwhelming desire: There is something terribly wrong with this body. I must leave it now. In the last few hours of his life, Meriwether Lewis may have employed his pistol and razor to accomplish that end.

Clark first heard of Lewis's death from a

newspaper at Shelbyville, Kentucky, on October 28th.<sup>46</sup> He wrote to his brother Jonathan, "I fear O' I fear the weight of his mind has overcome him, what will be the consequence?" Thomas Jefferson learned sometime in November. He also had little doubt that Lewis had taken his own life.<sup>47</sup>

The tragic death of Meriwether Lewis shifted to Clark the burden of preparing for publication the journals Clark and Lewis had kept on their Expedition. Lewis had done very little to advance the project. Clark traveled east and engaged Nicholas Biddle, a young lawyer from Philadelphia, to undertake the tremendous task of distilling the raw journals into a narrative. Clark and Biddle met in Virginia in the spring of 1810.<sup>48</sup> The notes that Biddle recorded during his interviews with Clark have great value as an "addendum" to the journals and were published in Donald Jackson's *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*.<sup>49</sup>

Correspondence with Biddle during the next few years was extensive and consumed a great deal of Clark's time, even after he had sent former Corps member George Shannon to Philadelphia to assist Biddle.<sup>50</sup> Biddle's edition was finally published in 1814, but only 2,000 copies were printed.<sup>51</sup> It seems woefully inadequate to those of us who have been spoiled by Gary Moulton's edition, but Biddle's edition and Patrick Gass's journal were the only ones available to the public until the 1890s.

In 1813 Clark was appointed Governor of Missouri Territory, an office he held

until Missouri became a state in 1820.<sup>52</sup> As governor and Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Clark found himself caught between the interests of the growing number of settlers eager to push westward and the Indian nations who already lived there. It was an impossible task, as government officials before and after Clark discovered, to reconcile the differences and facilitate a peaceful blending of such widely different cultures. The tribes of the West respected Clark for his efforts; St. Louis they referred to as "Red Head's Town." But if Clark was unable to divert the inevitable triumph of Manifest Destiny, he at least influenced it with honor and compassion.<sup>53</sup>

Four more children were born to William and Julia: William in 1811, Mary in 1814, George in 1816, and John in 1818.<sup>54</sup> The death of his friend Meriwether was only one link in a chain of sorrow for William Clark. His wife Julia Hancock died at Fincastle, Virginia, on June 27, 1820.<sup>55</sup> She was only thirty-seven. Seven-year old Mary Clark died in 1821.<sup>56</sup>

William Clark married the widowed Harriet Kennerly Radford at St. Louis in 1821. Two children were born of this marriage: Thomas in 1824 and Edmund in 1826. Edmund lived less than a year.<sup>57</sup> Clark ran for Governor of Missouri when it became a state but was defeated. President James Monroe re-appointed him to the post of Superintendent of Indian Affairs in 1822 and two years later he was named as Surveyor General of Illinois, Missouri, and Arkansas.<sup>58</sup>



Clark was widowed a second time in 1831 when Harriet died on Christmas day.<sup>59</sup> Clark passed away in St. Louis on September 21st, 1838. He was sixty-eight.<sup>60</sup>

*This day I completed my thirty first year, and conceived that I had in all human probability now existed about half the period which I am to remain in this Sublunary world. I reflected that I had as yet done but little, very little indeed, to further the happiness of the human race, or to advance the information of the succeeding generation. I viewed with regret the many hours I have spent in indolence, and now soarly feel the want of that information which those hours would have given me had they been judiciously expended. but since they are past and cannot be recalled, I dash from me the gloomy thought and resolved in future, to redouble my exertions and at least indeavour to promote those two primary objects of human existence, by giving them the aid of that portion of talents which nature and fortune have bestowed on me; or in future, to live for mankind, as I have heretofore lived **for myself**.*

—MERIWETHER LEWIS

August 18, 1805.  
"Fortunate Camp" at the forks  
of the Beaverhead.

Written two days after he had insured  
the success of the Expedition.





# Afterword

When William Clark died in 1838, only six other members of the Corps of Discovery were known to have still been alive. Ancient Toussaint Charbonneau was still working as an interpreter among the Mandans and Hidatsas up the Missouri River. His son Jean Baptiste, aged thirty-three, was off somewhere in the Rockies. William Bratton, about sixty years old now, was living in Indiana. Francois Rivet, the acrobatic French engage, finally retired from the Hudson's Bay Company and settled in Oregon's Willamette Valley. He was eighty years old.

Alexander Willard, aged sixty, was trying to keep up with the Wisconsin farmyard full of grandchildren his own twelve sons and daughters had brought into the world. Fourteen years later Grandfather would lead the Willard family to California. Patrick Gass was in West Virginia. Seven years earlier Gass had decided that since he'd turned sixty it was about time he settled down and started raising a family. Now he was hearing "Father!" from a number of different directions at the same time.

When Old Pat died in 1870, he was the last known surviving member of the Corps of Discovery. The last one to remember a keelboat bucking a crazy brown river, breath-snapping cold at Ft. Mandan, a moccasin portage through miles of cactus and grizzlies on carts he had built himself, a poor but giving people at the Great Divide whom Janey Charbonneau called her own, a starvation struggle across snowed-in mountains too many to count, Indians and a million salmon on the banks of a big

blue river that sometimes puckered up to squeeze through a narrow chute, a sky that leaked every conceivable form of water for an eternity of four months, a cocky ride and paddle back across the whole works, and a final visit to the grave of a young man who might have outdone them all had he lived.

The best season of my job with the BLM is summer, when I am a park ranger on Lemhi Pass. It is a humbling experience. Some of the people I meet are just passing through and aren't aware of the pass's connection with the Lewis and Clark Expedition. But others come as pilgrims to a shrine. They know. I can see it when they get out of their autos that they know they are on sacred ground.

Stephen Ambrose wrote in the introduction to *Undaunted Courage* that the first night he ever spent at Lemhi Pass was the "most glorious" night of his life. He also knew.

I'm asked often if I know how lucky I am to have my job. Yes, I know, too. I never take it for granted. I feel the excitement each time I drive up the road to start another day.

Early in the morning and in the evenings it's quiet. Sometimes I might be alone for an hour or more. I'll look to the east and imagine four men with knapsacks and long rifles walk with purpose up to the crest. Meriwether Lewis, George Drouillard, John Shields, and Hugh McNeal stop and stare at the western horizon. More mountains!?! A curse, a spit, a slow headshake.



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Disappointment? Oh, yes. Despair? Not here. Not these men. Mountains can't shrug off men who have gone the length of the Missouri River, over three thousand miles, the hard way. You might slow them down, but you won't stop them.

I lose sight of them when they drop over the edge into Idaho. Later, if it's evening, I may see a thin skein of smoke rise from their cooking fire several miles west of the pass. In a few days they're back again, with a small party of Agai Dika, Shoshone "salmon eaters." This is their homeland. A young Shoshone woman carries in her breast a prayer that the Creator has brought her lost friend home again.

I close my eyes and watch the path grow busy, horses and people coming and going for what seems like a week. Finally, the last party reaches the top. Here are Lewis and Drouillard again, the Charbonneaus, and Cameahwait. For the first time I see Sgt. John Ordway, tailor Joseph Whitehouse, fisherman Silas Goodrich, and the others. They stare at the mountainous horizon, those seeing it for the first time shaking their heads in disbelief, their friends saying, "See?" They walk down the hill, grateful for the Shoshones and their packhorses.

It gets lonesome up here, but they'll come again.

**Mike Crosby**



# Notes

## Chapter 1

### The Selection of the Members of the Corps of Discovery

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4. Stephen E. Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 69–71.
5. Richard Morris, *Encyclopedia of American History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 223.
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7. Jackson, 16.
8. Ambrose, 73–75.
9. Jackson, 10–13.
10. An excellent discussion of the Louisiana Purchase is to be found in John Kukla, *A Wilderness So Immense*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003)
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14. *Ibid*, 57–60.
15. Ambrose, p. 98. A detailed account of William Clark's efforts to aid his brother George will be found in James J. Holmberg, ed., *Dear Brother: Letters of William Clark to Jonathan Clark* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), Chapter One.
16. Jackson, 110–111.
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21. Large, 5.
22. Jackson, 99.
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25. *Ibid*, 67.
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27. Milo M. Quaife, *The Journals of Lewis and Ordway* (Madison: The State Historical Society of

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30. *Ibid*, 126.
31. Ambrose, 117–118.
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34. Quaife, 19.
35. Holmberg, 60.
36. Moore, 20–21.
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## Archive / Artists Abbreviations

APS	American Philosophical Society
BL	Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale Collection of Western Americana
BLM	U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management
LOC	Library of Congress
MH	Michael Haynes- <a href="http://www.mhaynesart.com">www.mhaynesart.com</a>
MHS	Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis
WH	Ward Hooper Design
SI	Smithsonian Institution

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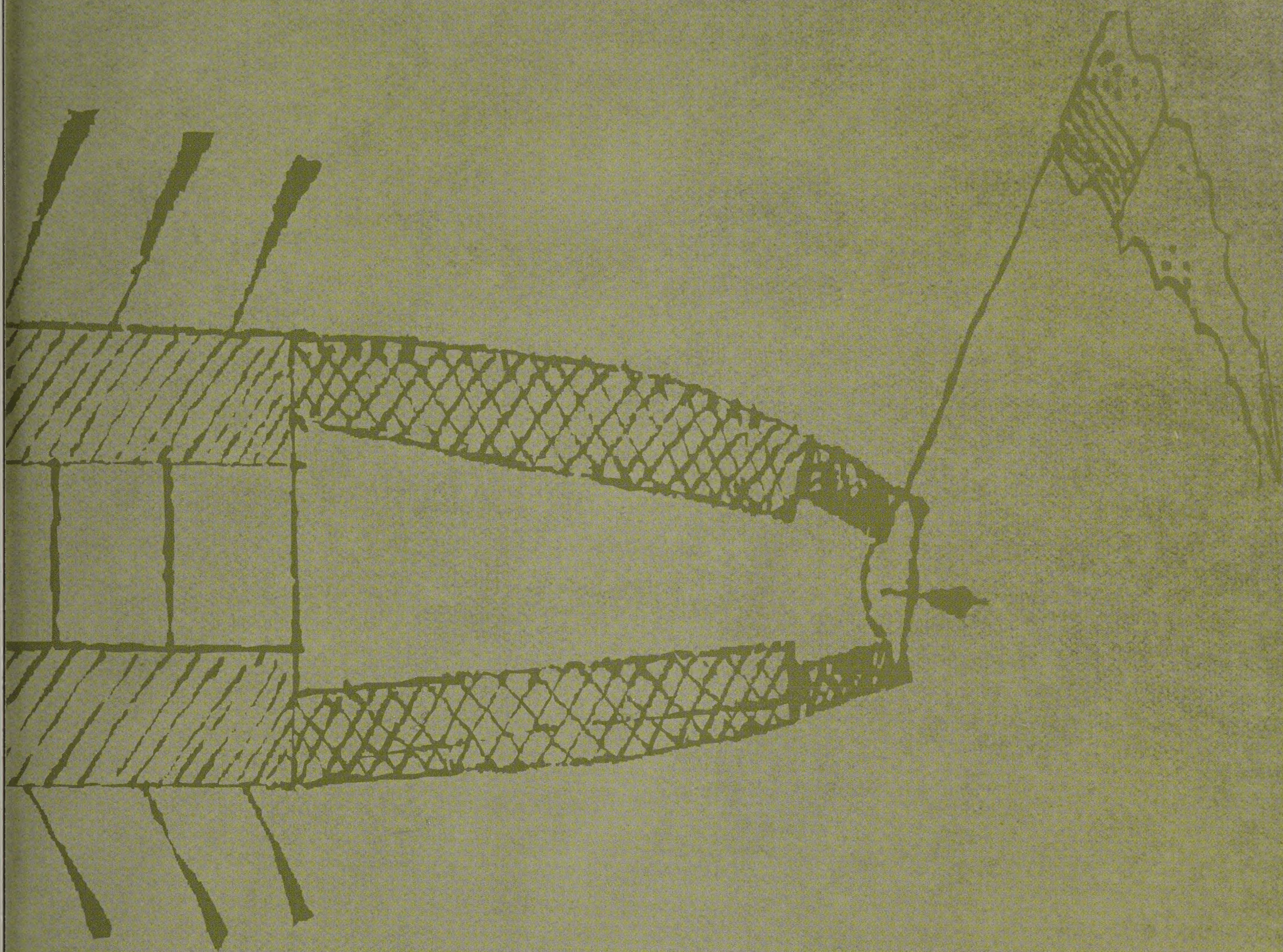
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